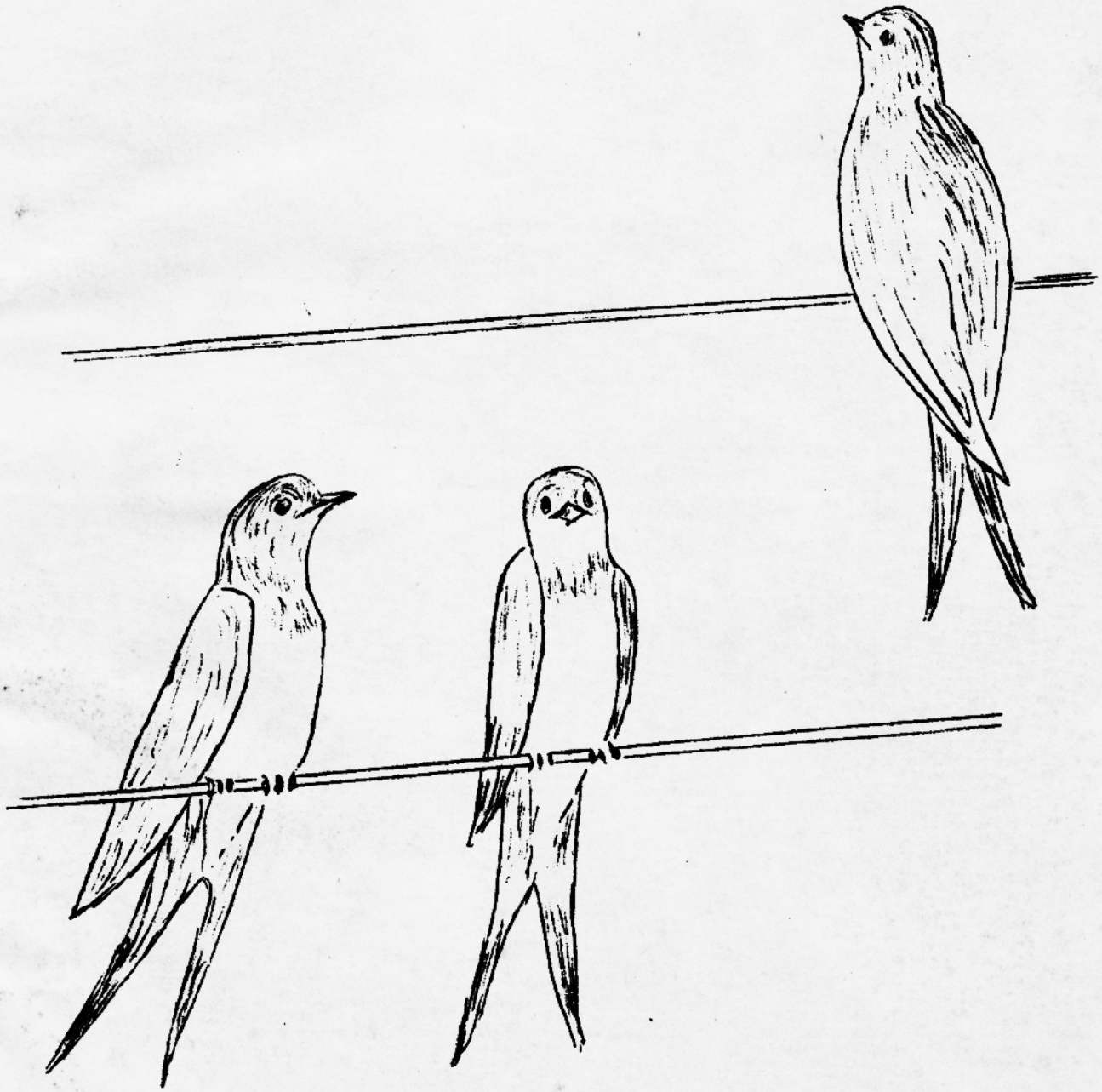
NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 8 March 1968



POST SCRIPT:

I have just learnt to my horror that in the November 1967 issue of the Newsletter (Vol.7, No. 11). The first article entitled "Two Visits to Nepal" was not written by Louis Werner. Will the actual author and Mr. Werner please accept the Editor's apology for this mistake; and will the author please reveal his identy.

ZAFAR FUTEHALLY

4.3.1968.

NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 8, No.3 March 1968.

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BLACKNECKED STORK (XENORHYNCHUS ASIATICUS) AND THE MARRIAGE OF MIRSHIKARS.

By

B. Robert Grubh & P.B.Shekar.

Mirshikars are a group of Muslims (see Newsletter Nov.'67: "A Week in Bharatpur" by S.F.) found in various parts of Bihar, whose occupation has been trapping birds since several generations. The abundance of birdlife , especially waterbirds, and the lack of proper enforcement of the Wildlife Rules in Bihar enabled the Mirshikars and certain others to make bird catching the occupation of their caste. Here we shall see how Loha Sarang the Blacknecked Stork had been associated with the social life of Mirshikars.

If a Mirshikar youth wanted to marry a girl, besides fulfilling all other conditions and formalities, he would have to catch an adult Blacknecked Stork, alive, single-handed and unarmed, but for his glue-and-rod device, Here let us digress a little to discuss how this device works. Several canes of about an inch in diameter and ten feet length are fittled one on top, thus making a single rod of considerable length which gradually tapers towards one end. At that end a slightly upturned and trifurcated stick is fixed, on which a kind of strong glue is applied. The man holds the other end of the rod and manoeuvres it with amazing skill towards birds sitting quite far away, on the ground. The bird would not fly away because the man is at a 'safe' distance. The bird would not know that the stick, approaching it steadily, is 'remote-controlled'. When the tip of the rod reaches the right distance the hunter gives a quick forward jerk to the rod and the glued stick fastens itself well into the feathers of the victim. The bird cannot free itself from the stick, be it a sparrow or a bird of the size of a vulture. This method is used for birds even today, and we have witnessed it.

Nw let us go back to the story. On the day of marriage the bridegroom starts from his house with a party comprising of his people and those of the bride, and marches towards the place where the Loha Sarang is known to be present. The procession stops as soon as the bird is located. The bridegroom goes alone to get the bird. We may wonder why so much fuss is made for catching just a bird. However, the Blacknecked Stork is shockingly ferocious when cornered. The bird stands on its knees with partly open wings, facing the enemy and waits for a chance to plunge its bill, which is like a dagger, into

its opponent. As it is a tall and huge bird with long and agile neck, it is not very easy to catch it bare-handed.

If the bridegroom was successful in catching the bird the procession would move with him on to the bride's house and the marriage would take place. If he could not succeed on that day, the marriage would be postponed. When he finally manages to catch the bird, perhaps after several attempts, the marriage date would be fixed and the wedding would be solemnized. As it was prevalent among Muslims, they could marry more than one girl, if they desired so. But the hunting of the stork would have to be repeated each time.

This custom was stopped some forty years ago, following a tragic incident. A bridegroom set out with the people to catch the Blacknecked Stork for his marriage. He managed to fix the bird with the glue, and approached it. When he tried to catch it the worst thing happened - perhaps because of some mis-calculation on his part. The bird gored his side fatally, and he died on the spot.

The above episode is true to the best of our knowledge. We got these facts from the Mirshikars and others who live in their neighbourhood.

BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OUTING

By

Shama Futehally

On Sunday 19th February, the Club met, not as it usually does at Tulsi, but at Andheri: breakfast at our house, and then a walk through the 'meadows' behind the house to Juhu. Although the area is being rapidly built up, on this trip we saw enough that was new and interesting to make it a memorable walk.

First, Rosy Pastors: two or three of them feeding off a blossoming silk cotton tree. We got a very good view of these, they did not fly off for a long time. Then there were the wagtails, a couple of white wagtails, and some Eastern Grey. There were plenty of European swallows. On the side of the road we were following, I saw one or two Tree Pipits, merging beautifully with the background, and a group of five or six Ring Plovers were startled into flight. There were many flocks of ordinary sparrows but one of them proved to consist in part of Brown Munias as well, established on barbed wire fences, taking off frequently to indulge in a short circular flight, returning to the identical spot again and again. Another discovery was one rather unusual bird, the Desert Wheatear. As far as I remember, this was perched on a stone wall and then on a boulder. There were two of them, some distance from each other. A thrilling new species, and if we had seen nothing else, they would have made the day.

Another lovely bird we saw was the Collared Bush Chat on a fence, one single male with a bright rose-orange breast, black head and back, and white patches on the neck. We had a long and excellent view of this bird rummaging among the dust for food.

Later we settled round a creek with a few small islets, reputed to be covered over completely with migrant birds sometimes; but now had only a few stray Sandpipers, one Spotted; one Little Egret, and a couple of Common Kingfishers. Then we walked along beside the creek on a dirt track, thick mangrove vegetation at the side and there were Blyth's Reed Warblers by the dozen in the bushes. Incidentally, there was a train of camel-wallahs coming along and I had a jerky ride along the road. Once we were arrested by a loud and harsh chuk-chuk from the mangrove, punctuated by scuffling and the sound of creaking twigs. Dr. Salim Ali identified this as a large Reed Warbler, uncommon in the area. But the bird, did not respond to our various eager claps and hisses, and remained hidden.

That makes about fifteen inspiring species, a revealing total for this otherwise dull and stony stretch of ground.

BIRD WATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF ROORKEE

By

Joseph George

Field outings were organised once a month or oftener in 1967. The average attendance was six which we consider very encouraging for a small town like Roorkee. A rare bird seen was theTerek Sandpiper.

Fiv e film shows on birds and other wildlife were arranged. We are now finding it difficult to get new films.

Dr. G.L. Christie, visiting Professor from Canada at the Roorkee University, addressed the Club on his impressions of the fauna and flora of India. Shri K.M. Vaid of the Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun, delivered a lecture on 'Badrinath and Valley of Flowers'.

Nestboxes installed in gardens and school premises in Roorkee were taken by the Blackheaded Myna, the Common Myna, the Roller and the Spotted Owlet.

WILDFOWL SURVEY

(Reproduced below are two letters from Christopher Savage, Honorary Coordinator, Asiatic Wildfowl Working Group).

I am very interested to read in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers that you have been counting ducks in Nagpur District. We are of course most interested.

I am sending you copies of our latest count forms and should be most grateful if you could airmail to me details of any counts made in January so that they may be included in the 1968 January Census Report. In due course I should be very glad to have details of all your counts as these will be valuable in assessing seasonal distribution and status.

Meanwhile I am putting you on our mailing list for next year.

(Letter addressed to Mr. T.S. Venugopalan).

I was very pleased to see this letter to which theabove is a'reply'. We are having a wondeffful response to the Census this year and by all indications of a higher quality than last year.

One thing that puzzles me is that several reliable observ ers have reported Scaup. I cannot really accept this without further justification and I wonder if it would not be timely if you could put a notice in your splendid Newsletter to ask your readers to send in to you full details of unusual sightings supported where possible by observations by at least two other experienced observers. Scaup are very exciting as up till now they have been very rare visitors. You might add that anyone shooting a rare duck by accident should try to send in the skin for confirmed identification by the Bombay Natural History Society.

(Letter addressed to Mr. Zafar Futehally).

[Will readers kindly co-operate with Mr. Savage and heed his advice about being more than usually careful in reporting Scaups — Ed.]

THE BIRDS OF THE GIR SANCTUARY

By

Zafar Futehally

Some years ago Mr. J.K. Sen of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta, sent me a list of the birds of the Gir Forest. This consisted of 96 species plus three 'doubtfuls'. Mr. Sen was in the forest for six weeks in January-February. This list was useful during my recent visit to the Sanctuary (21-23 February) with the group sponsored by the Fauna Preservation Society, London. There were many keen bird-watchers in this group and the tour leader Sir Hugh Elliott was knowledgeable enough even about Indian birds to be able to identify several nebulous forms in the distance. During the short period devoted to bird-watching we saw over 60 species, consisting of members of many widely separated families. I will refer to a few which caused great excitement among the visitors.

We in India have got used to the Coppersmith (Megalaima haemacephala) and seldom take time to admire its elegant colouring, but our friends from temperate lands were quite overcome by the sight of this bird 'tonking' away from the top of a bare teak tree. Another delightful bird much appreciated was our Golden-backed Woodpecker (Dinopium benghalense) whose golden and scarlet colours and merry laughter enlivened the somber setting of the dry teak forest.

Birds of prey always pose special problems of identification. If they are high up in the sky in bright light their colours escape even a good pair of binoculars. If they are sub-adults their plumage is very different fromthat of their parents which is the one usually illustrated in the books. I have, however, been fairly familiar with the White-eyed Buzzard (Butastur teesa) and the Shikra (Accipiter badius), but both the birds would have eluded identification were it not for the presence of Sir Hugh. This Shikra in the compound of the Guest House at the Gir, had a very broad white eye-brow, and white and brown markings on the breast, very different from the finely vermiculated front of the bird in my garden. Apparently, Shikras have a very wide variation in plumage markings and there is a great difference between male and female, young and old.

The three Buzzards were high up in the air, and their beautiful and cosy acrobatics was something I had never witnessed before. I have always been under the impressing that they are a lazy species, waiting endlessly on a lamp post for a cricket or a mole to pass beneath them and provide an easy meal. It was the call Pit-Teer, Pit-Teer which gave them away. There is a good description of this in Whistler's "A Popular Handbook of Indian Birds". There were three birds, and one seemed to be slightly smaller than the other two, suggesting that the three were a family unit.

I will continue this account in the next issue.

CORRESPONDENCE:

The November copy of Newsletter for Birdwatchers was of special interest because of the article by Werner, "Two Visits to Nepal." We were on home leave at the time he was here so did not have a chance to compare notes on what he saw on the trek north of Kathmandu. I would like to make a few suggestions regarding species mentioned based on our observations for the past ten or twelve years.

Mr. Werner mentioned a Black Tit at about 9,000 feet. He gave his identification as a Sikkim race only found in eastern Nepal. Hodgson's Cole Tit (Parus ater aemodium Blyth) is the more common species in that area although the Rufous-bellied Crested Tit (Parus rubidiventris rubidiventris Blyth) is also present. It may be the latter bird he saw.

About March 20th, the most common Leaf Warbler in the oak forests in that area is Phylloscopus pulcher pulcher Blyth. The wing bars are conspicuous. This is several weeks too early to expect P. proregulus at any height. The Greenish Warbler (P. trochiloides viridanus Blyth) is on migration in March, as Werner observed. P. t. nitidus Blyth, moves in to the hills mostly in April. The Yellow-rumped Leaf Warbler [P. proregulus chloronotus (Gray)] is numerous in that area from March onward. With at least twelve species and sub-species of Leaf Warblers moving through Kathmandu Valley in spring and fall, it is indeed difficult to keep track of them. However, Mrs. Desiree Proud has detailed records in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, Vol. 53, No.1, 1955, pp.62-64, which prove extremely helpful for us who live in Kathmandu Valley.

The data from rhododendron forests at about 8,000 feet needs a comment or two. One would expect the tree creeper at that altitude to be the Sikkim bird, Certhia discolor discolor Blyth, also in Kathmandu Valley in winter. Short-billed minivets are confined to far eastern Nepal bu the Long-tailed Minivets (Pericrocotus ethologus favillaceus Bangs and Phillips) is to be expected here. The Woodpecker with a "warm orange ochre breast" would be the Eastern Rufous-bellied Woodpecker [Dendrocopus hyperythrus hyperythrus (Vigors)] rather than the Fulvous-breasted species. Of course the Himalayan Pied Woodpecker [Dendrocopus himalayensis albescens (Baker)] is only in far western Nepal but the Darjeeling Pied Woodpecker (D. darjellensis Blyth) is here.

On the succeeding paragraphs I might add that the Black Eagle [Ictinaetus malayensis (Temminck)] which we saw at close range two weeks ago appeared to have no white either above or below. In regard to flock of thrushes, the last week of March is too early for Tickell's Thrush (Turdus unicolor Tickell). Both Zoothera mollissima mollissima (Blyth) and Z. dixoni (Seebohm) breed in that area but I have never seen them in large flocks. The description suggests the Black-throated Thrush, Turdus ruficollis astrogularis Temminck, not all of which have "black" throats.

It would have been rather unusual to have run across Mrs. Gould's Sunbird [Aethopyga gouldiae (Vigors)]. We have seen it once in eighteen years. The Nepal, A. nipalensis nipalensis (Hodgson) and Fire-tailed Sunbirds, A. ignicauda (Hodgson) are fairly common, however.

Finally, the identification of the White-crested Laughing Thrush given is for the far eastern Nepal race, while the one here is Garrulax leucolophus leucolophus (Hardwicks).

I might add that we have an interested group of adults in the Valley who go on birdwalks together. One has proposed we organise a "Spiny Babbler Club" with the only requisite for admission that he has seen this species. Because of frequent visitors from abroad, it is also proposed we get out a check-list for the Valley and surrounding hills. Such lists were invaluable in the United States and Britain when I was looking for birds in those countries.

1 February 1968.

Robert L. Fleming, Sr.
Shanta Bhawan,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

I was indeed sorry to miss the annual meeting of the Field Club last Saturday afternoon; it would have been most pleasurable to sit on your lawn again, and drink your tea, and renew acquaintances there. Please excuse me for not coming.

Actually I expect you will ap rove of the way I spent the day. My activities were in sympathy with your interests and those of our society. While you lunched, Sir, I was wading far from land in a soggy-bottomed tank surrounded by flocks of Ruff and White Ibis and Openbilled Stork. In the early afternoon, while you took your nap, I lay on my stomach in the mud squinting through a telescope. And when you were arranging chairs for your meeting and welcoming the first members to arrive I was squatting on the dry bed of the River Palar contentedly eating an iddli and watching -- as always, in vain -- for pratincoles. I say con tentedly because I had set out that morning with a specific and limited ob jective, and was now able to feel more or less certain that I had achieved it.

The ob jective was to follow up a hunch about Glossy Ibises. There appears to be a conspiracy among writers on Indian birds to deny to the south-east of the country the regular occurrence of many species which are in fact quite common visitors, and to assume that occassional vagrants are singular rarities. A good instance of the former penchant is that of the Blacktailed Godwit; 'common ... south to Bombay (Salsette), less common to very rare in the Peninsula and Ceylon' says Ripley; perhaps he got this idea from the Vernay surveyors, who put the bird firmly in square brackets and wrote, 'This species is however so rare in Central and Southern India that it cannot be included in the Presidency list until a more positive record is forthcoming'. The Bartailed Godwit they ignore altogether, and Ripley restricts it to West Pakistan, western India and Ceylon: which is precisely the same range he allows the Whimrel. Now both the Blacktailed Godwit and the Whimbrel commonly winter on the Madras coast, and the Bartailed Godwit is not impossibly rare (I saw a single bird last Sunday, at Pulicat). These are merely examples of what seems to be a trend in the literature of the Indian avifauna -- due, probably, more to a paucity of human observers and correspondents than to any genuine lack of birds -- a tendency to underestimate the quantity and variety of migrants which regularly or sporadically reach the south-eastern seaboard. This is not a thing forwhichthe authorities should be censured; the distribution of birds is not a static phenomenon, and for want of observers they must often rely on out of date records, or make assumptions from the absenc e of any. But it means that on the question of the range of some species the field is wide open for fresh discoveries.

The Glossy Ibis is probably, pace Ripley, a sporadic visitor to the south. But as far as I know its only firm claim to hon orary South Indian citizenship is based on three skins in the Hume Collection at the British Museum (JBNHS 39: 451). Methhed mouldering smelly dead things! It is more than eighty or ninety years, I suppose, since they dibbled with their numenious bills in the mud and preened their glistening black and green and purple and russet plumage. Have none of their posterity ever followed their doomed trail southwards since then? On the basis of reliable published records, apparently not -- though there may be some post-Vernay record buried in the Journal which I have missed. I did not know this when ten days ago I saw a distant party of twenty-one 'black' ibises feeding in the shallows of Madurantakam Tank. They were unidentifiable, anyway, being up-sun and far away. I was only struck by their glossiness. I daresay the Black Ibis is just as glossy as the Glossy Ibis, but the sheen I saw gave me a hunch, and when I later read about those exanimate husks in Kensington it became all the more important to examine the Madurantakam birds again properly.

There were twenty-three birds there on the day of your meeting, and I got quite near and watched them for an hour or more through a good telescope in perfect light. I was later ab le to ap roach within a few yards of them. They had none of the characters which are diagnostic of the Black Ibis.

The heads gave no impression of nakedness, and bore no trace of red wattles. There was no white anywhere on the shoulders, and the legs appeared the same colour as the beaks -- a dull greyish black. A tinge of rufous was to be seen on the feathered portions of the tibias of one or two birds, but there was no sign of the Black Ibis's brick-red legs. One bird at least was near enough for me to see faint longitudinal pale flecks on the neck, which is a feature of the non-breeding plumage of the Glossy Ibis (Henry).

It is some years since I saw a Black Ibis at close range, nesting in Gujerat, and if I made notes I've lost them. I should therefore be most grateful if any of your readers who are familiar with Black Ibis would confirm or deny that the established characters, in particular the white patch on the shoulder and the red legs, are invariably easy to spot at close quarters and are present in birds in and out of the breeding season and at all fledged ages. It is so easy to be absolutely wrong about things like this, especially when one is following a hunch.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

R.A. Stewart Melluish.

Holloway's Cottage,
19 Casa Major Road,
Madras 8.

24-1-1968

Would somebody please identify these two birds? I cannot find them in Whistler or Salim Ali's "The Book of Indian Birds", or "Indian Hill Birds".

1. On October 17th, we saw a bird resembling a dove sitting on a bush in an area of waste land, comprising eroded ridges of ironstone shale near Kulti, West Bengal. We observed the bird through binoculars from a distance of about 70 yards, in clear afternoon sun. Its entire head and neck were a subdued pinkish brick colour. The back, wings and longish tail were brown. There seemed to be a slightly scaley effect on the wings. Eyes and bill dark, legs not seen. When it flew away to one side of us, there was a definite impression of grey blue. It was quite silent all the time we observed it.

2. We heard this bird in our garden about 6 times last winter, between October and early March, but only saw it once. We have again heard it several times this winter, and managed to see it on January 1st evening, sitting in a hibiscus hedge. It appeared to be smaller than a mynah, with a rather dumpy figure. Head, neck, back, wings and tail were dark brown, with the wings folded rather high. The wings were covered with coppery buff spots. The whole of the underside was buff, with thin dark bars running from wing to wing, all the way from the dark throat to the tail. A dark line through the eyes, running back to the wings. A slight crest on top of the head, with a dark line running through it from bill to back. The tail was barred. The bill was short, straight and very sharp and tapering. Bill and legs greyish, eyes dark. Its flight was noisy at the start like a dove's, and continued in a series of short dips. Its call sounds like "chlee" repeated rapidly seven or eight times.

Sanctoria,
Disergarh P.O.,
District Burdwan,
West Bengal.

Mrs. Sarah Jameson.

[Unfortunately the Editor cannot help]

Today I observed a small bird of the size of a sparrow on the top of a mango tree which seems to be a Verditer Flycatcher, but its colour was much deeper blue above and more slaty blue below than the picture in Salim Ali's "The Book of Indian Birds". Is the colour in the book incorrect, or did I see a different bird? The bird had no patch of white anywhere on the body or on the tail.

The Nilgiri Verditer Flycatcher has been described by Salim Ali as duller coloured, but the picture of the bird in "Indian Hill Birds" is much brighter than the picture of the Verditer Flycatcher in "The Book of Indian Birds". Can you throw some light on this?

Kameshwar Singh.

A.N.S. College,
P.O. Barh,
Dist. Patna (Bihar).

20.2.1968.

[Dr. Salim Ali will reply in the next issue -- Ed.]

In the February Newsletter under the heading "Birdwatching in Andheri", you have mentioned the call of Blyth's Reed Warbler (Acrocephalus dumetorum). I could not find any description of it in Salim Ali's "The Book of Indian Birds". In the Synopsis by Ripley, only distribution in India during winter is given. I would like to have a short description, so that I may be able to identify it more accurately. I have heard as well as seen the bird, but I am not so sure.

M4/4
Hirakud.

M. R. Ray

15.2.1968.

[You will find a description of this bird in Hugh Whistler's "A Popular Handbook of Indian Birds" -- Ed.]

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Zafar Futehally,
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers,
32-A, Juhu Lane,
Andheri,
BOMBAY 58-AS.

WILDFOWL SURVEY

c/o Bombay Natural History Society
Bombay 1

20 August 1966

Dear Sir

INTERNATIONAL WILDFOWL COUNTS

Winter Counts - 1966/67

We are writing to ask your cooperation in a special effort being made this year to extend the coverage of the Wildfowl Survey which was started two years ago now under the auspices of the Wildfowl Trust.

There are many ways in which you could help us depending on time you can give us and the wildfowl resources of your district. The most useful however would be participation in the winter counts. Further details are given in the enclosed literature. We would hasten to add that regular observations on a favourite shooting ground can help materially in determining the general patterns of distribution. More helpful of course would be two or three counts throughout the winter on as many different areas as possible. But whatever areas are counted we would particularly ask you to cover the most important ones in the mid-January period so that these may be included in the international mid-winter counts.

All participants in the mid-winter counts will be given free of charge a copy of the annual report by the International Wildfowl Research Bureau on the Mid-Winter Counts and local interim summaries and reports. Details of "exact locations" will not be published.

A limited number of 'Colour Plates' are available to help with identification. These can be supplied on request as long as supplies last. A Waterfowl Guide is in preparation which it is hoped will be available in time for the season 1967/68.

We should be glad if you would let us know as soon as possible if you are willing to take part in this project and also your estimated requirement of count forms so that these can be sent to you in good time.

Yours faithfully
Zafar Futehally
Honorary Secretary
Bombay Natural History Society

WILDFOWL SURVEY

WINTER COUNTS - 1966

Counts are being organised in southwest Asia during the coming season in coordination with the International Wildfowl Research Bureau who for some years now have been making similar observations in Europe and the Middle East. The following notes are taken from the I.W.R.B.'s latest policy statement with only minor changes to suit local conditions.

The winter counts of ducks and geese are divided into three 'phases' namely:

Phase 1 - preparation of distribution maps
Phase 2 - participation in annual mid-winter census
Phase 3 - refinement of the distribution maps

In this note we shall only consider Phases 1 and 2.

PHASE 1. The preparation of distribution maps to show the main resorts of each species and the maximum numbers normally found there.

The AIM is to establish the general patterns of distribution as quickly as possible, and to correct the detail later as further details become available.

METHOD: two or three counts should be made each winter at as many different places as possible; these counts need not be on set dates but ideally should be spaced at intervals between September and March. The more important places should be visited around mid-January to allow the results to be used in the mid-winter (see Phase 2 below).

Such observations over a period of two or three years can be expected to proide a reasonably accurate assessment from which distribution maps can be prepared. These maps and the data provided by the counts will be used:

a) to assess the local and continental importance to each species of the various regions;

b) to indicate the areas where regular counts of wildfowl should be arranged in future.

PHASE 2. Participation in the annual mid-winter census

This is by far the most important project.

The AIM is to study the trends in population of the wintering wildfowl in southwest Asia on a continental scale, rather, on an inter-continental scale as similar counts will be taken in mid-January throughout the countries of Europe, the Middle East and the U.S.S.R.

The only practicable METHOD of doing this is by means of sample counts synchronised around 15th January each year on all the most important winter resorts within the winter range. The populations concerned breed mostly in central Siberia yet winter from Burma westwards and as far afield as Nigeria.

Complete coverage is impossible at this stage but it is desirable that as many areas as possible should be counted within a week on either side of the date given.

An international REPORT on the mid-winter census will be prepared annually and will be sent to all observers free of charge. In

order to permit the prompt preparation of these reports all observations should be sent in to the regional correspondents as soon as possible.

NOTE: Wherever possible regular counts each month should be undertaken in as many areas as possible as these will be of great value later when the PHASE 3 programme can be initiated.

ooooOoooo

METHOD OF RECORDING OBSERVATIONS

THE COUNT FORM. The following details should be completed:

a) The Exact Locality. The name and geographical coordinates should be given. In the case of large inland marshes the boundaries of the area observed should be noted and subsequent observations on the same marsh should be confined to the same area; if an additional area is covered even though adjacent it should be recorded separately.

b) The Date. (Gregorian Calendar)

c) Number of Species. The total number of species should be entered in the column provided on the front of the form. The blank spaces are for the rarer species not listed. When doubtful of the exact species enter "unidentified, probably " in the species column. If you cannot make an exact count give a rough estimate rather than a verbal description such as 'few', 'many' etc. NIL returns should be recorded if wildfowl are absent all together. If this is unusual a brief explanation should be given.

d) Local Conditions. On the back of the form note the conditions which may have affected the size or accuracy of the count. This should include any relevant comment on the seasonal sources of food supply (paddy fields, plants in seed, etc.) and any comment on water levels.

e) Remarks. Any further comments on numbers, distribution, behaviour, etc. of the birds would be welcome.

ESTIMATING NUMBERS IN LARGE FLOCKS. When large numbers are present on land or water one of the best ways of reaching an accurate total is to count fifty birds first and get a good idea of what such a group looks like. The start at one end and count the groups: 50, 100, and 50, 200, and 50 etc. This type of estimate should be made at least twice, starting from opposite ends of the flock, but quickly in the first instance in case something scares the birds. If numbers are only roughly estimated this should be stated.

Accurate estimates of wildfowl in flight are very difficult as the appearance of the flock alters with the formation. Geese when bunched look far fewer than they are but when stretched out in skeins, far more. Estimates of numbers of any species of wildfowl in the air should be avoided where possible.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

Many valuable observations can be made while out shooting even if there is no time for detailed counts. Such observations should be labelled as 'seen while shooting' or some such comment. Similarly generalised information drawn from notes in game books or diaries would be invaluable in regard to any areas in Asia in the present state of knowledge.

... 3

RETURN ADDRESSES

Count forms should be returned to the Honorary Organiser or the nearest local correspondent which ever is more convenient. Addi -tional forms can be supplied as required.

Honorary Organiser: C.D.M. Savage
c/o 11F Gulberg, Post Bag 704, Lahore

Correspondents:

The Hon. Secretary
Bombay Natural History Society
Hornbill House, Bombay 1

F.C. Badwar
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Waziriych, Baghdad, Iraq

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COUNT FORM
1966

W I L D F O W L S U R V E Y

(11F Gulberg, Post Bag 704, Lahore, W. Pakistan)

INTERNATIONAL WILDFOWL COUNTS

Several observations on the SAME water may be recorded on this Form. Please enter the dates at the head of each column and any remarks and comments on the local conditions on the back of this Form.

COUNTRY and DISTRICT: NAME AND ADDRESS of REPORTER:

EXACT LOCALITY:

NEAREST VILLAGE OR TOWN:

DATE	/ /196	/ /196	/ /196	/ /196	/ /196	//196
PINTAIL						
COMMON TEAL						
MALLARD						
SHOVELER						
COMMON POCHARD						
GADWALL						
WIGEON						
GARGANEY						
FERRUGINOUS DUCK						
TUFTED DUCK						
GREYLAG GOOSE						
BARHEADED GOOSE						
WHITEFRONT						
LESSER WHITEFRONT						
RUDDY SHELDUCK						
COMMON SHELDUCK						
GT/LR FLAMINGO						

P.T.O.

R E M A R K S

The spaces below are for remarks and comments on local conditions on each of the dates on which observations were made.

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 9–No. 1–1969 January



NEWSLETTER

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Birdlife of Pokhara, Nepal

By

Robert L. Fleming, Jr

Far to the north of the Siwalik and Mahabharat ranges of the Himalayas, lies the lake-studded Valley of Pokhara. Pokhari actually means ' lake ' in Nepali, and although the whole region is not inundated, there are three major lakes and several smaller ones here.

The image of Annapurna, elevation 26,500 feet (8078 m.), etched in the clear waters of Phewa Tal, elevation 2000 feet (600 m.), has to be seen to be believed. Machapuchare, 23,000 feet (6997 m.), although not as high as its sister peaks, is far more spectacular with its rock cliffs and steep ice walls reaching into the sky.

In October this year, we revisited Pokhara on a data-collecting trip and spent a delightful week on the Valley floor. Pokhara is easily reached by a 40 minute flight (operating daily) from Kathmandu. We headquartered in a moderate-priced hotel near the airstrip.

High on the list of places to go is Phewa Tal, the Valley's largest lake. During the 30 minute walk from the hotel to the water we noted some common garden and ' mangotope ' type birds -- Robin Dyals, White-eyes, Pied Bushchats and Crimsonthroated Barbets. Dugout log canoes are available at the lake and we recommend a liesurely trip staying close to the southern shore line. Here we flushed Brown Fish Owls, White-breasted Water Hens, Green Herons and Blackbacked Forktails.

Birds appear to concentrate at the far (i.e. west) end of the lake. Our boatman said that in peak weeks (mid Nov. and mid March), several thousand ducks assemble here. Our visit (3rd week Oct.) was too early; we could manage only five Brahminy Ducks and three Tufted Pochards. None of the Great-crested or the Blacknecked Grebes had arrived yet either. A trip after the middle of November would be more rewarding for these birds. Curiously, the new HANDBOOK (Ali and Ripley, 1968)

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only possibly occurring in Nepal (see page 3). This species is, in fact, fairly common on Phewa Tal where specimens were first collected in 1949 (see Rand and Fleming, Fieldiana, Zoology, 41(1): 48). Likewise, the Blacknecked Grebe, Podiceps n. nigricollis Brehm, is not included in Nepal (see Ali and Ripley, 1968: 5). However, it should be listed as a scarce winter visitor to Phewa Tal from where a specimen was taken in December 1949 (Rand and Fleming, 1957: 48).

Begnas Tal is far more difficult to reach than is Phewa. The former lake nestles against the foothills at the eastern edge of the Valley with Annapurna II (26,041 feet or 7937 m.) towering above. Col. James Roberts informed us that many ducks occur on this lake, so I peddled and pushed a rented bicycle eight miles to the edge of the water. In contrast to the eight ducks on Phewa, Begnas harboured about 75: mostly Teal and Pochards. The water of Begnas is opaque with suspended phytoplankton, and numerous aquatic plants help to generate food for passing birds. Greyheaded Fishing Eagles were conspicuous.

Over a little ridge beyong Begnas is the elongated Rupa Tal. Much of this water appeared brownish and from a brief survey, the shoreline seemed largely deserted of birds.

Besides lakes, the Seti Khola, with milky-green water from melting glaciers, runs through the Valley, cutting a deep and extremely narrow gorge through Pokhara town. At dusk, Rock Eagle Owls issue from the depths of this canyon. On the spray-dampened boulders above the gorge we saw the Brown Dipper, Whitecapped Redstart and Blue-Rock Pigeons.

Scrub forest and cultivations occupy the hillsides surrounding the Valley. Here the famous Spiny Babbler holds forth; we saw four birds just above the Phewa Tal outlet dam. When these babblers are calling, as they were in October, they are fairly easy to find.

For the energetic bird enthusiast, a number of other species are to be had on a short trek to the north. In February this year we spent four days on a hike to the lower slopes of Machapuchare. After leaving Pokhara town, we followed the west bank of the Seti to the village of Misra, and then climbed straight up into the temperate oak forests. Here we were greeted by Koklas Pheasants crowing in the early mornings while Rufousvented Yuhinas, Stripethroated Minlas, Nepal Sunbirds, Blackcapped Sibias and Hoary Barwings fed on the flowers of Leucoseptum canum.

It takes about a day to reach the base of the steep climb, a second to move into the temperate forest, and a third day to return to Pokhara. On a longer trip one also could sample cold-temperate or even alpine species. The views of surrounding peaks are consistently magnificent.

In summary, Pokhara Valley and its vicinity offers a rich variety of birds set amidst some of the world's most spectacular mountains.

A Flamingo-hunter's Journal: Part Three

By

R. A. Stewart Melluish

17 FEBRUARY 1968 (continued)

.... Having decided not to return to Madras today after all, but to motor back in a single day tomorrow, I find myself not knowing how to spend this extra time at Calimere. This is of course ridiculous. One can always walk along a shore with enjoyment and profit, and this I eventually do, though I suspect that PJ, who comes with me, is deeply conscious that we are not breaking new ground.

There are some Crested Terns out today, of the smaller kind, Thala-

birds of the local race of the larger species, Thalasseus bergii velox, have lemon yellow ones. Rarely seeing the two kinds together I can never, on the evidence of the bill colour alone, remember which is which, and I ought I suppose to din some feeble little mnemonic into my head to avoid question-marks in my notes. Perhaps it is enough to remember that L stands for both Large and Lemon. The other main differences between the kinds are that bergii velox is a darker grey than bengalensis on the back, mantle and wings, and has a white forehead throughout the year, whereas in summer the black cap in bengalensis reaches down to the base of the bill. velox is a heavy looking bird, not a great deal smaller than a Caspian Tern; bengalensis is more the size of a Gullbilled Tern. Of the birds examined today all except one had white foreheads and black lines running backwards from the eye and disappearing into the black of the hindcrown and crest. On this character alone they could have been taken for velox, but the exception, which seemed a shade bigger, had an all-black forehead and crown. This tern is primarily a winter visitor to India, as it breeds in the Middle East and Australia, and the birds which linger through the summer months usually wear winter plumage and do not attain breeding condition. velox however breeds at Adam's Bridge and is another candidate for examination here in May and June.

Also about were some Little Terns mixed up with a number of Whiskered. Why do they not look obviously smaller? By rights they should, but I often think that actual known differences in size are nothing like as easy to notice in the field as the literature implies. Another similar point is the colour of the Whiskered Tern's beak. Most authorities describe this as ' blackish red ' in winter, or simply red, without reference to the season. In the field however you can look in vain for a tinge of red on the beaks of the birds which winter in the south. They are a dull black, even in the brightest light and at as close a range as you can normally get to the living bird, unless you catch it. I have only seen one red-billed Whiskered Tern in ten years, and that had a full black cap and sooty grey underside and was clearly approaching its breeding plumage. But usually birds in quite advanced stages of this development still retain blackish bills.

Focussing again on the swamp, I see that a vulture can still find some bit of turtle worth picking at. Maggots, perhaps.

We brave the fisher colony this time, being determined to stay on the shore and not glue ourselves down in the swamp. The camp is scruffy and smelly with dead fish and dung; but it is not large, and we are soon through it and at the river-mouth beyond, which is alive with birds. PJ meets a fisher-boy and learns that his people are on a seven-day outing from Adirampattinam, which is at the end of the swamp to the west. It is good to know that the coast here is unlikely to become a permanent colony, for this year there is no trace of the fine undisturbed stretch of Crab Plover haunted shore I have known at other times. It is fouled and littered and populous, and the air is ragged with Brahminy Kites and gulls.

I cross the estuary — a feat which I have hitherto always funked, but which is possible at low tide — and land on a fine islet. This is the place we ought to have camped on earlier in the week. I begin to suspect that the boat we took with us was more trouble than help. If we had trusted to wading we could perhaps have progressed further and more comfortably.

Sitting there under a tree I count the flamingo on the swamp again. The first count is 570, then later more birds appear and I make it 802. I am told that very much larger numbers frequent the place earlier in the winter, numbers which make these figures of mine look pitiful, but I have never met anyone who has made such counts and until I do so and am won over I must remain a little sceptical. It is extremely hard work counting birds in a dense flock, and requires immense patience and practice. I wonder why one bothers to do it. With me it has become compulsory. I am ill at ease until I have done it, however meaningless the results. It is a silly way to behave; but I shall go on doing it.

Today, alas, my last day here for many months, there is no sign of any of the pinker birds I so much want to see and make certain of. These flamingoes are all roseus. They are spread out in the loosest formation, and stretch right along the northern skyline.

Yesterday's Dunlin are in evidence again, amongst multitudes of Curlew Sandpiper. A few Blacks, and possibly a couple of Bar-tailed, Godwits are to be seen feeding hurriedly in the shallows at the estuary's edge. There are Grey Plover on the mud, and suddenly some Large Sand Plover, which look enormous. They take one by surprise, so big do they look to eyes accustomed for days to seeing only Lesser Sand and Little Ringed and Kentish Plover.

Two very white stints whizz past at the ford, terribly white. The bar down the centre of the tail is almost pale grey, not at all brown. Landed, their heads I see are almost pure white; and their eyes, not set in a stripe of darker feathers, look like currants in a floury white bun. They run immensely fast over the sand on their tiny black legs, like glistening blobs of quicksilver or, as I whimsically observe in my small book, like snowflakes playing at being marbles. Pale wintry icy grey-brown upperparts, gleaming white underneath. They run into the gaps between the waves and out again when the next polyphloisbus collapse of spume threatens them. One of the two birds has a dark sepia lesser wing-coverts, abruptly contrasting with the neighbouring white breast.

These are the first Sanderling I have seen in India, and I believe they must be only irregular visitors to the south-east coast, or visitors in such small numbers that they are hardly ever to be seen.

In the same vicinity is a party of ten Turnstone, which is probably the largest flock seen on this expedition. This is another bird which is by no means common in these parts. Calimere never fails to produce a few, but they are rare at Pulicat, the only other large south-eastern coastal lagoon, and I have not found them anywhere else on the beaches and estuaries of the Carnatic, But then there aren't any stones for them to turn.

Why interpres? Arenaria interpres interpres is the Turnstone's name — the first such name I ever learnt. My father taught me it when I was nine. Arenaria makes sense, arena meaning sand. But what does this bird interpret? Does it perhaps translate pebbles into food?

There is only about an hour and a half of light left when I decide it is time to return to Kodikkarai. I cross the estuary and begin to make my way back to the cache of equipment and drink which I have left on a sandbank with PJ, who can occasionally enthuse about birds but has preferred this afternoon to engross his attention in a detective story. I am sorry, inevitably, that the week has come to an end at last without a confirmatory view of the Lesser Flamingo, but I have seen many other nice things. I glance north and cast a nonchalant eye at the strands of gangly white and pink birds of the familiar, but deeply beloved, phoenicopter breed. I turn away, and then back again, to look more attentively, with a sudden sense of sharp excitement. The scene has been transformed. There, at last, in the very middle of the straggly array of roseus, right in front of the peninsula we had slept on four nights ago, is a tight pack of five or six hundred of the most stupendously pink little flamingoes: Phaeniconaias minor in their splendour!

This time there can be no doubt what they are. For once there is a boat grounded on the mud nearby with a projecting timber at just the right level for a telescope and I can examine them in comfort. Alongside the roseus they are positively babyish; they are far pinker, their necks are stouter -- not the sort of exaggeratedly elongated neck that you think should coil round in a loop like a bugle-horn -- and their beaks are darker. It is difficult to say exactly what colour the bills are. Is it pinkish slate at the side, with a black tip? I am still rather too far off, so I begin a rapid plod through the ooze in the ripening sunset. The sight in front of me is magnificent. No doubt those who have seen these birds in their tens of thousands or even millions on the [illegible] of Eastern Africa or in Cutch would think such a tiny handful

splendid about this brave little group of wanderers, far south of their usual latitudes in India, something beautiful in their very meagreness, so detatched and independent and adventurous. They are a compact, tidy group, a manageable battalion, not a multitudinous army of millions. They stand solemnly in the dying sun, neat and silent and rose-carmine, surrounded by the fidgety Great Flamingo which have suddenly become too tall, ungainly, like some uncouth thing on stilts in a South German carnival, almost ridiculous.

Nothing in the world could be better. I flounder along, stop now and again to scan the extraordinary objects ahead of me, and then flounder on further till the dry ground is far behind and I am quite near the old camp once more. As I approach the birds put their heads up; a few unforld their wings and stand with them open, alert, as if waiting for a signal. to fly, but each hesitant to be the first of the flock to panic. Now and then they shift uneasily and it looks as if they will start to walk away, instead of fly, as roseus often do. Indeed they do begin to walk, but halfheartedly, and they go no distance. I imagine they have come here to roost for the night: as on the 14th they are in a close bunch, resting, not at all like the roseus which are all spread out feeding busily. They obviously have a different feeding rhythm from the bigger birds, and it may be that their diet and the parts of the lagoon which supply it are different too. Anyway they clearly do not want to move unless compelled to, and this is delightful, for they allow me to approach unusually close. In the end it is I who goes away. I leave them in peace, glowing in the twilight, roseate and miraculous, and trudge home content along the sand.

The End

A line up with erring Flamingoes

By

K. S. Lavkumar

It is always flattering to be in the centre of things and so I was a little pleased to find myself involved in a little controversy in the December issue of this Newsletter. To be discussed by people as Mr J. C. Daniel well placed in a Learned Society of Natural Historians and Mr R. A. Stewart Melluish equally so in a reputable House of Publishers, is indeed worth a pat on the back.

But of course if ones name is mentioned critically in print one must (I understand) at once send a rejoinder, or make some lame excuse to escape too critical an examination when in the centre of things. I propose to duck out of the spotlights at once.

First of all, Mr Melluish is right. I should have made a detailed list of all the birds I saw at Chilka since I was there not on a holiday trip but as an investigator for a most learned body and my unscientific attitude needs a severe rap, though receiving it from Mr Melluish is pleasant as to why will be apparent later on.

The Ringed Plovers at Chilka were the Little Ring Plover, dubius. As for the Snipebilled Godwit, Limnodromus semipalmatus, I have yet to see a bird sporting so stentorous a name and there is some misunderstanding about my having collected a specimen. I did not carry any intrument of murder, nor wished to commit any — even for the sake of science, though Shekhar did a horrible job of putting some poor slimy creature into a jar of some sort of poison. I remember it took long to die and I told Shekhar he should go straight across to Puri to make amends. Now coming back to myself. I am indeed very, very careless in keeping detailed notes — field or others and as such I (or rather Indian ornithology) now have lost a lot and what I recollect is no longer valuable to science. My field notes of the Chilka trip are

nothing to be excited about, but for me there is something particularly splendid about this brave little group of wanderers, far south of their usual latitudes in India, something beautiful in their very meagreness, so detatched and independent and adventurous. They are a compact, tidy group, a manageable battalion, not a multitudinous army of millions. They stand solemnly in the dying sun, neat and silent and rose-carmine, surrounded by the fidgety Great Flamingo which have suddenly become too tall, ungainly, like some uncouth thing on stilts in a South German carnival, almost ridiculous.

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laid up somewhere -!! Hurrying to the shelf containing the journals of the Bombay Natural History Society, I was horrified to find volume 63(2), August 1966 missing, nor could I lay my hands on a reprint which assuredly the Society must have sent me. So, all naturalists must surely wag a finger of reprobation at me; I humbly concede the omission.

It was thrilling to be the bone of whatever bones are, between people like Mr J. C. Daniel whom I know long and intimately and who has always made me feel I am a naturalist of worth (which I certainly am not) whenever I visit the Hornbill House, and Mr Stewart Melluish whom I met — once again no field notes kept — at one of the delightful get-togethers at our Editor's hide-out in Andheri some years back. I was amazed at his humour and to say the least envied this attainment. I remember wondering at the time why he did not write for the Newsletter for he would, I told myself, make enjoyable reading. It was thus with joy that I went along with him — sitting in my armchair — squelching through the Calimere mire, and am now eagerly awaiting each issue of the Newsletter to transport me to the wind, the sand and the glare of far off south India. So, my readers will understand why I am gratified when at last Mr Melluish has taken notice of me. I think his ' Lavkumar invariably writes well ' is more than a soothing balm on the chastisement he has accorded me for my omissions which I shall assuredly try to rectify.

Now, may I please request Mr Daniel to be a further good friend and send me a reprint of my report on the Chilka Survey, and turning to Melluish may I request him to give me the pleasure of a few days' company in the field either as my guest crawling in the tidal mud of our Saurashtra coasts or assure me of hospitality, doing the same in the Cauvery ooze so that I may learn the art of note keeping which indeed is necessary if a person wants to rise into the ranks of ornithologists and not merely remain one among humble birdwatchers.

And what of the main issue of the Flamingoes? Now, which were these? They certainly were the Lesser so my memory says, and they were in great flocks such as would be worth an amazement even on our own favoured shores. However, more clarification is possible only after I lay hands on my jottings, till then suffice that they were flamingoes. Very unsatisfactory but there is little that can be done.

Sandwiched as it were between two slices of ' Chilka Lake Surveys ' is a note by Mrs Raj Bedi. Here again I a bit involved! It would be interesting to know at what time of the year the Quail were so netted. There is a distinct possibility of banding for migratory studies. I remember the late His Highness the Maharaja of Bhavnagar talking of using calling Grey Quails to attract others of the kind into snares. Grey Quail are largely migrants arriving by the end of September. They were then caught regrettably because they made toothsome morsals.

Oh that again reminds me, another friend of mine lamented the other day how much wonderful information could have been accumulated had I, over the years of school-mastering, kept detailed notes on each and every lad who passed my way! All this makes me realise why all school masters do not end up as Pastologies, Freuds or Dr Kinseys reading learned papers before erudite societies, or why there are so few Salim Alis and Guy Mountforts and Roger Petersons. For that matter, what indeed was Charles Darwin but one of us who kept meticulous notes of everything he saw. A disturbing thought.

Birdlife of eastern India

By

Jamal Ara

I presume all those who will read this article can distinguish a crow from a myna. If you are one of those who can, you may proceed straightway with this article. If you can not tell a crow from a myna, please

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..... 7

then resume your reading.

A crow is bigger than a myna and it is black while the latter is brown; the two are two birds, or to use a slightly technical term they are two species. If you look about you may distinguish two types of crows — one bigger and wholly black, the other slimmer and grey on the neck. Each one is a species called respectively the Jungle Crow (Corvus macrorhynchos) and the House Crow (Corvus splendens). The italics within brackets are scientific names in Latin, of universal use, and the first word denotes the genus and the second the species. Jungle Crow and the House Crow are also names of the same type — the genus coming after the species — but these are popular names and sometimes vary from place to place. The Latin binomial names are equally descriptive, as though they are saying ' Crow, big-billed ', and ' Crow, splendid '.

The genus is a convenient name to lump together closely related species, but let us once again look at the mynas. You can differentiate two or three types there too. There are numerous snuff-brown chatter-boxes of bird walking about with a peculiar oldish and wise gait, half stooping and half stalking. There are the more active black and white birds, or to use a shorter word, the pied ones. The first is the common myna while the second is the pied myna.

It is easy enough to recognise such broad groups as crows and mynas but we begin to understand birdlife and take interest in them when we start distinguishing different types of crows and different types of mynas. When we become aware of the pied myna as a species distinct from the common myna, we are on the way to know birds.

If you travel by one of our long trains from Amritsar to Calcutta, you will see hosts of the pied myna all along though you may not notice the change the Punjab pied myna is as different from the Bengal pied myna as is the Punjabi human being from the Bengali human being. It is a sort of provincial difference of which you can not become aware unless you compare side by side one Amritsar pied myna with one from Calcutta.

Fortunately this has been done for you by others; people who sit in museums and measure and compare bird skins from all parts of the country. The differences are chiefly in size, but also in colour. According to such differences four geographical races of the pied myna are recognised. These geographical races are called subspecies and are denoted by a trinomial name, e. g. Sturna contra dehrae.

The geographical races are response of a species to the local environment and occurs according to two principles recognized by Bergmann and Gloger respectively. According to the first a warm-blooded animal (birds are such) grows to a bigger size as the mean temperature falls. That means that in the same species birds living in a colder climate will be bigger than those living in a warm climate. So size of birds — and size is an important distinguishing feature — will vary according to latitude and altitude.

From the Himalayas to Cape Comorin in a species birds will progressively become smaller. In the Himalayas and on other mountains birds will be bigger in the cooler upper regions and smaller in the foothills and the terai.

The second principle is that coloration — another important distinguishing feature — will be deeper and darker in warm humid areas and pale in cold arid areas. That means birds in a species will tend to be darker and deeper coloured in the warm humid areas of eastern and southern India than in the arid (with cold winters) areas of northern and western India.

Combining these two observed trends, one would expect a gradation from

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Combining these two observed trends, one would expect a gradation from large light-coloured subspecies in northern India, more so in the northwestern deserts of Rajasthan and the Punjab, to small dark subspecies of southwest India and northeast India, though the higher latitude

[1]Three geographical races are now admitted in the Indian avifauna (Ripley, 1961, SYNOPSIS), dehrae being treated as a synonym of typical race contra. — Ed.

and altitude would introduce some prominent differences.

The most notable illustration of Gloger's theory was worked out by Dillon Ripley (2) showing a marked break along the valley of the Kosi river. According to him 21 species had two distinct populations or subspecies on either side of the Kosi and 67 per cent of these showed a distinct break in the fauna. As he says: ' No geographical or geological factors seemed to enter in, but right down the falley (of the Kosi) there is an Isohyet, a band west of which the annual rainfall is fifty inches, east of which the total rainfall is 75 inches. Correlated with this was a distinct change in year-round climate, greater humidity, and a more even spread of rainfall in the east, drier conditions and more c[illegible] contrast between winter and summer in the west '. Holding that characteristically the bird populations had responded to this environmental change, he stated that subspecies to the east of the Kosi had more dark pigment in their plumage.

We all know that Cherapunji in Assam is the rainiest spot in the world, receiving about 450 inches each year. In western Rajputana the rainfall is less than 20 inches each year. Entire eastern India receives rain above 40 inches, and in the easternmost are about 100 inches. No other part of India is as much humid except for a narrow belt along the Western Ghats down from the Panchmahals and there is a large belt of intervening dry and hot country. The birdlife of eastern India, has, therefore, got to be distinct from the rest of the country.

Most wide-ranging bird species in India, because of difference in mean temperature and humidity, have got several subspecies recognized by differences in size and colour. Sometimes the colour differences are not only questions of paleness and density, but also involve alterations like an additional wingbar.

The subspecies roughly correspond to the main zoogeographical subregions into which India is divided. There are

1) The Indo-Gangetic plain, which excludes the Brahmaputra plain, but includes North Bihar and deltaic west Bengal .

2) Peninsular India, south of the Indo-Gangetic plain, and including Orissa and Chotanagpur (Bihar)

3) The Himalayas — the entire range including the Assam Himalaya.

4) Assam, plains both sides of Brahmaputra and hills on both sides of it, also Tripura, Manipur and Lushai hills.

The Indian or Oriental region of which the above mentioned four units are parts also includes the Indo-Chinese and Indo-Malayan regions which are outside the political boundaries of India. The Oriental region [illegible] separated from the Palaearctic region by the Himalayas in the north and the deserts of the west. The Palaearctic region includes the whole of Europe, Africa north of the Sahara and all Asia outside the Oriental or Indian region.

In eastern India the peninsular and Himalayan regions closest to each other, the bare 150 miles between Sahibganj and Dharambazar. The peninsular and Assam regions are also closest here the distance being the 200 miles that separate the Rajmahal and Garo hills. The Himalayan and Assam regions adjoin each other for the Brahmaputra valley is narrow and hemmed by mountains on either side, and in the extreme east of the Himalayas turn round the Brahmaputra gorges and sort of continue in the Naga Hills. The influence of the Indo-Chinese and Indo-Malayan subregions is also the maximum in eastern India generally and in Assam particularly.

The result of this drawing together of three principal zoogeographical subregions is that eastern India has a very rich birdlife. In the checklist of Bihar prepared by the present writer there are as many as 547

bird forms, and it is a safe estimate that the total for the whole eastern India is thrice the total for Bihar. How big is the figure of over 1500 subspecies can be realised when we recall that the standard work on Indian zoology The Fauna by Stuart Baker enumerates only 2500 subspecies for what is now India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon. Or in other words 60 per cent of the avifauna of the entire Indo-Burmese subcontinent is found in eastern India alone.

(To be continued)

Notes and Comments

The Editor wishes all the members of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India a very Happy New Year and enjoyable birdwatching.

To the errant members of the Editorial Board who have not sent in any contributions during the last year a special request is made to make amends during the present year.

* * * *

Readers are reminded that the Annual General Meeting will be held at 5 p. m. on Saturday, 4th January 1969, at the residence of the Editor at Juhu Lane, Andheri. We hope that the meeting will be largely attended. Those of you who cannot come will be missed but those who intend to come could help by informing the editor in advance (telephone 571279). These occasions provide an opportunity for a valuable exchange of ideas about the Newsletter and the activities of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India. We have not really lived up to the name of 'Field Club' and we hope that some constructive projects can be discussed at the coming meeting.

* * * *

Erratum

The Editor regrets that he invented a new bird species without meaning to do so. In the October 1968 issue of the Newsletter, p. 10, the editorial note following the letter by H. N. Mathur refers to Blyth's Flowerpecker. This should be Tickell's Flowerpecker.

Correspondence

Eastern limits of the Kashmir Roller

On 25th November I observed pale blue rollers sitting on a tree. There were about four of them. The underside was almost bluish white and the upperside was pale blue. Wings were also plain pale blue and there was black streaks through the eyes.

I think that the birds were Kashmir Rollers. According to Dewar they were reported from Lucknow as the eastern limit but if these birds were really Kashmir Rollers then this is perhaps a new record of these birds being observed 250 miles east of Lucknow.

Kameshwar Pd Singh
A. N. S. College, Bihar

* * * *

Probable breeding of an injured Bronzewinged Jacana

Recently we have observed successful breeding of a male Bronzewinged Jacana (Metopidius indicus) in the suburbs of Calcutta.

Last July while passing by the side of a fish pond we heard a flapping sound from a thick growth of aquatic vegetation. We saw a few boys collecting Trapa (singara) nearby, and when they advanced towards a bush the jacana emerged.

Being injured it could neither fly nor run. We caught it and gave it first aid after which we let it free.

We were glad to see the bird again after a few weeks and recognised it by a small piece of stick tided to its leg. Apparently it managed to breed successfully with its broken leg for we found 4 olive-green eggs floating on a mass of vegetation. One of these was collected by our colleague in August.

R. N. Mukherjee
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FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 9–No. 2–1969 February



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Bird Watching at Belgaum-May, 1968.

By

A. Navarro, S.J.

During the May holidays, at the instance of Mr. Alphonso, the Manager of a farm near Susaghondatti at Belgaum, I was invited to spend a few days birdwatching at his farm. With the firm assurance that I would not be disappointed and the fact that Mr. Alphonso himself is a keen enthusiast, I accepted his invitation. On my second round on the farm I did notice plenty of birds, but at the same time I could foresee that the presence of that large and varied avian fauna of that locality was due mainly to the surroundings. The farm is like a large triangle. On one side it is connected with other farms: hence from this side there was a large expanse of open cultivated land with a few patches of scrub forest, here and there, with some uneven lines of trees along the bullock-cart tracks running through the neighbouring farms. On another side as far as I could see, there was forest - an endless evergreen forest. On a third side passing through a forest, a broad stream - evergreen on both banks with a great variety of vegetation made up mostly of tall trees, grasses, bushes and creepers - formed the centre of attraction for many forest birds in the early hours of the day. At this point we had a sharp and clear division of these different environments: the exuberant vegetation along the stream, the open land and the evergreen forest. An ideal spot for birdwatching!

My final list at the end of my holidays was made up of over a hundred varieties; and I take for granted that most of the birds are permanent residents of that locality. I am not going to give a systematic list of all the birds I saw but it is better that I should place them in the environment where they were observed.

In the open land, in spite of some slight irregularities in the weather, I did not notice any change in the bird population. The same birds could be seen on the same spots day after day: there were the House Sparrow, the Brahminy Myna, the Jungle Myna the Magpie Robin, the Indian Robin, the Pied Bush Chat, the Green Bee Eater, the Indian Pipit, the Syke's Crested Lark, the Black-Bellied Finch Lark, the Common Weaver Bird, the Spotted Dove, the Red Wattled Lapwing, the Yellow Wattled Lapwing, the Fantail Warbler, the Jungle Bush Quail, the Painted Partridge, the Black Partridge, the Hoopoe and the Rufousbaked-Shrike. A few common Crows and a single pair of Common Kites were confined to one of the far-off neighbouring farms in a small village. Some of these birds were often seen on the outer fringe of vegetation along the stream.

I spent about nineteen days on the farm, confining my birdwatching activities within a small area of about fourteen square miles. I wanted to observe how methodical the birds could be in the daily rhythm of their activities and movements; with this object in mind on several consecutive days I made my rounds at the same hour and along the same track. During this time the weather underwent slight changes and on two occasions it was stormy with heavy rains; at times there were light showers. I never expected that this irregularity of the weather could have such influence on the behaviour of the birds. Nevertheless, it was only after the heavy rains that the Whistling Thrush, the Nilgiri Laughing Thrush and the Black-Capped Thrush could be seen in an open patch of the forest. After a light shower the weather was really pleasant. It was on these occasions chiefly in the mornings, when more birds used to come to the very edge of the forest and sing for hours on end as if they were more eager to rejoice and enjoy their own music than to feed themselves. It was a real concert, a medley of all kinds of songs and sounds. The concert used to last till eleven and it was so loud that it was audible from quite a distance. On the other hand, the Chloropsis, the White Throated Thrush, the Spotted Babbler, the Green Barbet and the Coppersmith prolonged their concerts until mid-day. After that for three to four hours, on most of the days, there was a still silence all over the forest.

The birds most often seen within the forest area were the Velvet Fronted Nuthatch, The Common Iora, the Yellow-vented Bulbul, the Paradise Flycatcher, the Scarlet Minivets, moving in pairs as evidence of the breeding season. The small minivets, however, were still seen in small flocks. The Bronze Drongo, the Racket-tail Drongo, the sunbirds, the flower peckers, the tailor bird, the Quaker Babbler, the Indian Pitta, the Common Grey Hornbill, the Great Hornbill, the Black-headed Oriole, the Greyheaded Myna, the Green Pigeon. The woodpeckers that could be identified were the Maharatta woodpecker, the Heart-spotted woodpecker, the Malabar Great Woodpecker, and the Golden-backed Woodpecker, the Great Horned Owl, the Grey Jungle Fowl and the Red Spur Fowl.

It was very interesting to observe how from the early hours of the morning a large number of birds emerged from the forest and moved up to the stream until midday when they retreated once more into the forest. The birds most often seen were the Red-vented Bulbul, the Red Whiskered Bulbul, the White Browed Bulbul, the Koel, the Crow-Pheasant, the Blossom Headed Paraqeet, the Flycatchers - four in number, the Tickells, the Fantail, the Brown and the Black Naped - the Jungle Babbler, the Common Babbler, the Yellow Throated Sparrow, the White Eye and the King Crow. The Shama and the White Throated Thrush were in a real singing mood as their songs never did stop earlier than two or three in the afternoon.

The Ashy Wren Warbler and two more unidentified Warblers, the White-breasted Kingfisher, the Pond Heron, and the Fishing Owl were the only birds that could be seen all day along the stream and usually at their particular spot.

The only birds seen flying directly from the forest to the open fields were the Jungle Crow, the Jungle Myna, and the Serpent Eagle, The Honey Buzzard very rarely were seen out of the forest area.

The birds more often seen in the sky were the Tawny Eagle, the Kestrel, and the White Backed Vulture. A pair of Black-winged Kites when not in flight was often seen perched in a tree at the entrance to the forest.

For some time the White-bellied Drongoes were freely seen in good numbers along the stream when suddenly they disappeared. I saw them again but this time they were moving in pairs right into the forest, a sign that their breeding season has started. In the last few days I noticed the Black-headed Cuckoo Shrike and the Large Cuckoo Shrike.

My final verdict is that most of the birds mentioned above were rather free in their behaviour and movements. Nevertheless, now and then I was able to collect a few facts that reveal that these birds are methodical in the rhythm of their daily activities and movements. A group of Egrets used to make its daily appearance early in the morning and settle down for a long time on the same spot. Then they used to fly off for the rest of the day. Day after day a group of Wire-tailed Swallows made their appearance at six-thirty in the morning, flying around the building in search of insects for about an hour and a half and resting at intervals on the electric wires; after that they would disappear until the next day. Another group of unidentified swallows could be seen every day at the same time on a definite patch in the forest area, circling the sky for some time and at intervals perching on the topmost branches of tall trees until midday, but for the rest of the day they could not be seen anywhere. Late in the evening at the same time and in the same area a group of Palm Swifts could be seen circling the sky until dawn.

Early in the morning at six o'clock a jungle cock used to crow as it moved along the same track day after day, repeating the same operation in the evening at seven sharp. A pair of Black Partridges could be heard calling every day at the same time at about seven-thirty, as the birds were going the same path.

The behaviour of a White-breasted Kingfisher was most curious and attracted my attention if not everyday at least rather often at about five every evening: with vociferous calls it flew from the stream to one of the gates of a football field and sat there motionless; if not disturbed, it used to remain thus for a period of over thirty minutes and then fly back into the forest, constantly calling and moving from one side to the other in short spans of flight, along almost the same route and finally going back into the stream.

Birds which are gregarious by nature, as are the Egrets, Swallows and Swifts, keep the rhythm of their daily activities and movements throughout the year, except during the breeding season. Somehow the birds have to adjust themselves to the annual cycle of the four seasons of the year; therefore, their timings and spots may change but the sequence of their daily rhythm is the same.

Birdlife of Eastern India

By

Jamal Ara
(Continued)

For the birdwatcher this richness of the avifauna means often the presence of two or three geographical races of each species in eastern India. Sometimes the number is more. In Bihar alone there are 35 resident species which have two forms - one Indo-Gangetic and another Peninsular, the river Ganges being generally a rough boundary between the territories occupied by the respective subspecies. Similarly the river Brahmaputra in Assam is a rough boundary and frequently the territory to the north of it is occupied by one subspecies while another inhabits the area south of it. The Kosi has already been mentioned as boundary, but the most remarkable instance of it as bird frontier is in regard to the little brown dove which extends from Kosi westwards across two continents right upto Senegal in extreme West Africa but is not found east of that river.

We have seen how climate as governed by latitude and rainfall affects birdlife, but we have not noticed that eastern India spreads over ten degrees of latitude. The south western tip of Orissa (in the Koraput District) is only 19° North Latitude, while the north eastern tip of Assam (in the Mishmi Hills) is 29° North Latitude. A spread over ten-degrees of latitude is a very big spread, but a similar ten degree wide zone intervenes between Cairo and Khartoum in Egypt and in exactly the same latitudes. There the birdlife is not so rich as in eastern India and only about 600 forms are known. Neither is the birdlife so rich in the region between Saharanpur and Hyderabad where less than a 1,000 forms are known.

The richness of birdlife in eastern India is due to the configuration of land, particularly the Bay of Bengal coming upto within 350 miles of the Himalayas. Following from it rainfall is not only heavy in eastern India but varies a great deal, resulting in a variety of vegetational forms.

Then again the topography is extremely varied, from the sea level of Orissa and West Bengal beaches to over 20,000 in the Assam Himalayas, and altitude in tropical regions becomes a very important factor influencing birdlife. There are vertical altitudinal birdlife zones up a mountain and so within a short surface area many bird forms, which would have normally in a flat country spaced themselves out over a vast area (reaching upto the Arctic circle), crowd together increasing the richness of bird life. The Himalayas alone are not the mountains introducing such variety in eastern India. In Bihar two points reach upto 4,000 feet or more and on the Orissa border in the Eastern Ghats there is a point exceeding 5,000 feet. There are numerous hill-tops in Orissa and Bihar exceeding 3,000, much of Darjeeling district is between 6,000 and 10,000; most of Southern Assam, Manipur and Tripura is above 4,000 and a few points in Manipur reach upto 8,000.

In India low-level or plains birds have a sort of ceiling between 2,500 and 3,000 feet; they generally do not inhabit higher areas. At numerous points throughout eastern India the ordinary plains air fauna gives way to hill birds, and a beginner has to supplement Salim Ali's 'Book of Indian Birds' with the same author's 'Hill Birds of India' to be able to recognise the common birds. So wide spread is the influence of this factor that over the entire Chotanagpur, Darjeeling District, northern and southern Assam, Manipur and Lushai Hills the most common birds are those adapted to high-altitude life.

Then there is the fact that in the eastern or Assam Himalayas the snowline is lower than in the western Himalayas. Plants, animals and birds preferring a colder habitat come down a good thousand feet in the east. The Kaleej Pheasant comes down with the Chirpine to the thousand feet contour in the Ramnagar Dun and adjoining Siwaliks in the Champaran district of Bihar. In the Duars of North Bengal and in the Brahmaputra valley in Assam, especially in the extreme northeast many hill-birds come down to the plains.

After climate and topography the most important factor controlling and determining birdlife is vegetation, which is itself determined by latitude, temperature, rainfall and topography. To trace changes in birdlife according to changes in Vegetation types-say from Coniferous to Sal forest - will require space that cannot be given in this article. So we shall limit its vegetation, to three broad types - (1) forests, (2) village and town orchards, parks and shrubbery, and (3) cultivation.

Cultivation imposes a grass-land vegetation on an area by keeping out trees. It is an imposition in rainy eastern India and develops best in extensive plain areas. There are six such areas in eastern India. The most important is the Indo-Gangetic plain of North Bihar, which continues through the North Bengal Duars to the Brahmaputra valley of Assam east-wards, south-wards to deltaic lower Bengal. The fifth area is the Orissa Coastal plain which includes the Mahanadi delta and is a continuation of lower Bengal; the sixth is the plains of Tripura.

Birds need trees and shrubs for cover and hence in extensive cultivated areas there is not adequate cover for many birds, especially those that are conspicuous on account of gorgeous plumage or are slow on the wing due to long tails. In the cultivated plains such birds are generally eliminated.

Then owing to protective colouration birds which spend much of their time feeding on the ground have to be so coloured as to be not conspicuous in a field to birds of prey like the hovering hawk. Buff and brown plumage affords excellent protective colouration in cultivated fields, while green and blue are the best protective colours in trees. Arboreal birds are therefore more gorgeously plumaged than terrestrial or partly terrestrial birds. For example, compare the green pigeon with its close cousin the dove. Arboreal birds are sometimes splashed with yellow and red patches; these help camouflage, for many trees have yellow or red flowers and berries. There is only one bird which seems protectively coloured for both terrestrial and arboreal habitats, and that is the roller; it has magnificent blue wings while it is flying but these fold under buff over-alls when it sits on a clod of earth or a grassy knoll.

In cultivated fields there are more terrestrial birds than arboreal; the latter being confined to roadside treelines and village groves. Pipits, larks and such buff and brown inconspicuously coloured birds are numerous in cultivated fields. Fortunately for eastern India brown fields are limited to a few arid areas in Bihar; elsewhere greater humidity preserves grass all the year rounds and the green bee-eater uses stalks of ricefields to nest and is a beautiful bird.

In the more humid areas of Bengal and Assam, the village groves tend to be small forests and many gorgeously coloured parakeets, orioles and flycatchers are found.

Village and town orchards are frequented by arboreal birds and it is surprising what interesting forms survive even in the heart of a city like Calcutta. There in the Eden gardens, golden backed woodpeckers are seen frequently; the Dhayal flits about the garden of the National Museum just behind the Chowringhee and the yellow-cheeked tit swoops round trees around Victoria Memorial and the National Library.

In Finn's Birds of Calcutta the following crows, treepies, babblers, bulbul, black drongo, tailor bird, Oriole, myna, dhayal, sparrow, sunbird, woodpecker, barbet, roller, kingfisher, swift, koel, parakeet, owl, vulture, kits, dove, gull and paddybird are listed.

The plains of eastern India are traversed by big rivers like the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the Kosi, the Gandak, the Gogra, the Teesta, the Sone and the Mahanadi. Besides, in North Bihar and Western Assam there are extensive marshes, chaurs and Jheels, Most birds of inland waters are found in eastern India, including hundreds of types of waders and ducks from the colder countries of the north which come each winter. Not only do these rivers and marshes constitute a habitat for inland birds like waders and ducks but also for sea-birds like gulls and terns.

Birdlife is teeming in the forests, and the eastern regions contains such showy things as the large pied hornbills, malkoha, Orioles, Minivets, Paradise fly-catchers, sunbirds, chloropsis, black crested yellow bulbul blue-headed rock thrush etc.

In the built-up only some birds survive as house crow, treepie, yellow cheecked tit, common and pied mynas, sparrow, black drongo, kite, vultures, parakeets, dhayal, shrikes, bee-eaters and doves etc.

From this survey of bird life in eastern India we get an idea that there are two major types of habitats - the highlands and the plains. Each of these two habitats undergoes variations according to rainfall which increases from a mean of 40 inches in the west to over 100 inches in the east. Roughly there are four rainfall belts 40-50, 50-70, 70-100 and over 100. Then the highlands are zoned into three belts acc, to altitude (a) from 2.500 to 5,000, (b) from 5.000 to 10.000; and (c) above 10,000.

The plains are varied by four types of landuse, field-agriculture, orchards and parks, forests and built-up areas. The forests themselves are divided into five or six types of vegetation with corresponding intricate changes in birdlife. And then there are big rivers, creating oceanic conditions in land.

From all these differences in habitat we get seven broad classes of birds:-

1) Birds of the hills and mountains.
2) Birds of the open plains below 2.500.
3) Birds of the Sea- (a) along the sea coasts (b) on inland waters.
4) Birds of rivers, marshes and inland waters.
5) Birds of the forests,
6) Birds of very humid areas.
7) Birds of rather dry areas.

From the birds which have shown adaptation to the above mentioned natural habitats, have come the birds which have shown maximum tolerance to to built-up and industrial sites, for in eastern India exist the biggest urban and industrial areas in the country.

But the birds which have shown adaptation to these natural habits are more often than not geographical races, adaptations to factors of temperature and humidity, and are either Himalayan, Indo-Gangetic, Peninsular or Assamese subspecies.

Even all this seemingly confusing material is relatively simple if we omit a historical cause- pleistocene glaciation. That happened about 20,000 years ago and rendered most of the Himalayas and Assam and Chotanagpur hills unsuitable for birdlife. It also pushed several northern species towards the Cape of Comorin and towards Malaya. Such a push split several homogenous forms into isolated communities which later developed specialised characters. We do not know how many species died in the process.

Glaciation also brought southern lowland species in touchwith colder conditions and when the glaciers receded bird life advanced northwards and up mountains, but we cannot be sure that the original hill-top and northern species reconquered their lost territory. Probably southern and lowland species once acquainted with colder conditions developed adaptability to these and spread faster and multiplied quicker. Their colonisation killed some species or drove them to small areas where they now survive as relict species. Species which had been split into Malayan and South Indian populations did not display an equal adaptation to changed conditions, and one or the other spread faster.

In the absence of accurate data about the distribution of species and subspecies it is difficult to reconstruct the processes through which we have come to have the sort of the bird life we have at present in India. We need many more birdwatchers before we are able to solve the numerous distributional problems that the bird life of eastern India poses us with.

Birds seen through a Hospital Window

By

Usha Ganguli

A birdwatcher, whether he is in a garden or a railway train, a crowded street, a hospital or even a prison - is always attuned to the notes of bird calls and his eyes follow the movements of birds. The execellent monograph on the Redstart is a case in point. John Buxton collected his material for this book while he was a prisoner of war for 5 years in the hands of the Germans during the 2nd World War. As prisoners of war other ornithologists have also made studies of the Swallow, Wryneck, Goldfinch, etc. It is not, therefore, surprising that I should get interested in birds in the neighbourhood of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences during my recent hospitalization there for two months.

Pigeons were the most regular visitors in the hospital. They roosted behind the first three ledges of the cement venetian blinds on the top floor of the huge six storey O.P.D. block. I think they have colonized this place fairly recently. About 60 birds came to roost singly or in small groups; they flew straight to the ledge and disappeared behind it. Early in the morning while some flew directly away from the ledges, others flew up to roof and waited there awhile before they went off to forage.

A plot of land between the O.P.D. block and the hospital had been cleared and a lawn laid, and it was copiously watered. I wondered if it would attract White Wagtails. One day I heard the cheerful call of wagtails, two Masked Wagtails-Motacilla a. personata had arrived on the still fairly bare lawn. After that they came every morning, occasionally also on late afternoons. Once both had a bath in a puddle formed by a leaking hydrant. One of them had a dark and the other a grey head, perhaps they were a pair. Once I saw one of them hold its tail almost vertically while its wing tips shivered slightly. It was evidently a kind of display, but why a display in autumn? But then I have seen these birds behave similarly even in November.

The other regular visitors were a pair of Brown Rock Chats (Cercomela fusca). A third was present on rare occasions. They came down to the lawn in quest of insects and moved along a cement drain, and sometimes came up to our window sill. My sister fed them on biscuits and other tidbits at tea time and they began to appear regularly for the scraps. My sister has a way with birds and animals. At Saharanpur, she managed to attract a pair of these birds with peanut kernels. They became so accustomed to

the food that they would come at the appointed hour, give a sharp call to announce their arrival, fly down from the roof when the food was served, eat the kernels and depart.

A pair of Mynahs with scrawny fledglings were also members of my sister's tea party. Scraps thrown from the 2nd storey window would attract them and they would eventually arrive on the window sill for more!

Two crows with two fledglings were seen for a few days. The ubiquitous Sparrows show were there, sometimes came into my room. Once a female assiduously foraged behind each window curtain, perhaps seeking insects for her young.

Kites and Whitebacked Vultures soared every day, sometimes in the company of Egyptian Vultures. Twice I saw raptors, one of which was definitely a Kestrel. A few Bee-eaters once landed on an electric wire. Swifts twittering in the sky were often seen. Swallows flitted away too fast for correct identification.

As there were no trees or bushes in that part of the hospital, garden birds like Babblers, Bulbuls, Tailor Birds, Ashy Wren Warblers, and even Indian Robins were totally absent. Birds which travel far to forage, like Mynahs, Crows and Pigeons; and birds which associate with human beings for nesting and or roosting purposes;-- Pigeons, Sparrows, and to a certain extent-- Brown Rock Chats were commonly seen from my hospital window. Rock Chats are generally seen around old ruins, but they sometimes patronize tall buildings too. I have seen a pair on the Secretariat Buildings. A pair were nesting for a few years on a rafter of the roof of a veranda in front of the Nurses' Duty Room in the Willingdon Hospital.

Although I saw only 13 species of birds in two months, they brought much pleasure and variety into my otherwise monotonous existence in a hospital.

Rednecked Phalarope in Kutch

By

M.K. Himmatsinhji

It was after a gap of over eighteen years that I recently came across the Rednecked Phalarope, Phalaropus labatus (Linnaeus), in Kutch. My last sight record of this bird was on May 15, 1949 (J.B.N.H.S. Vol.54 No.1, 1956). I came across four of these birds, all together, swimming about on a small pool of water in the bed of a tiny dry nullah (stream) just over 6 miles west of Mandvi on September 26, 1968. Only three birds were left there on the 27th and on subsequent visits to the spot upto September 30, only two were seen. All the four of these Phalaropes were in their winter plumage. This one and the previous records of the occurrence of this bird in this region point to the fact that the Rednecked Phalarope is a rare straggler into Kutch, perhaps in Saurashtra also, while on its way to and from its winter quarters.

The Rednecked phalarope, in its habits, is unlike any other wader seen in these parts. It swims most of the time and its antics are worth watching. It is very tame and allows one to approach within 5 to 6 yards before it takes its short flight to settle down again on the surface of the water and resumes its activities with its longish neck erect and the tail end held slightly upwards. The only call note heard was a distinct tick,

tick, tick uttered while it took the short flight. In winter plumage the predominating colour is white which extends from both sides of the head, neck and from the chin downwards to the extreme end of the undertail coverts. Except for the forehead which is white, the grey forecrown and nape are joined by a greyish stripe down the hind neck to the back. The back and wings being of varying shades of greyish-brown with some yellowish-white vertical markings somewhat reminiscent of the colouring of the snipe. The darkish colouring extends to the tail. A dark streak from the eyes to the earcoverts and a distinct long wingbar, seen in flight, were the most prominent markings observed. One or two birds had a faint brownish-red wash on the breast starting from about the middle of the neck. This along with the faint greyish streaks on the sides of the lower breast and body were visible only through field glasses. The beak is longish, thin, pointed, straight and black. In summer dress the glistening white chin, the rich brownish-red sides of the neck and metallic chestnut hind neck are clear pointers to this Phalaropes identity. The female is more richly coloured than the male.

BOOK REVIEW

By

K.S. Lavkumar.

The Clue Books: BIRDS by Gwen Allen and Joan Denslow; illustrated by E.A.R. Ennion. (Oxford University Press). Price: 10sh. 6d.

Another book on British birds off the press! One just wonders who buys all these books and what more there is to write on the British birds. In India, with our vast country ranging over so many variations of flora, there is scope for so much writing, and yet, talk of publishing a book on birds and there is a glum shake of the head. A book with coloured illustrations! Why, to promote such a venture would mean the backing surely of some magnificent Maharaja or a fabulous Marwari, and that is the end of the matter.

Here is an attractively brought out book bound in hard board, a square format with clear print on fine paper. Each page filled with bold illustrations in colour wash or line drawing, intermingled with salient text composed of terse points. The entire matter is brought out with imagination which makes or should make the introduction to birds of England fairly simple for a child. The birds are in groups on each page, and there are clear instructions on how to attract birds to the garden, how to keep notes, what to note - size and shape of bill, structure of feet, flight and some common birds in silhouette - on land, in trees and on water, very practical and very useful, for this is how birds are most often seen.

After the preliminaries, birds are grouped on each page in families or those with similarities of size, habit and shared environs: a couple of representatives for each. The birds are painted in bold water colour washes accompanied by a short descriptions of habitat, habits and location of nests - just the sort of information an amateur would like to have or would, without special effort, be able to discover. An interesting feature is that birds the size of or smaller than a Sparrow are drawn life size, while larger birds have a sparrow in small silhouette beside a scaled outline of one of the representatives on the page. In short, here is a primer for the bird watcher whether a child or a grown up.

.....10

Had this been a book on Indian birds I would have said it should be a must for every child at home or at school. Even so, there are many birds which are Indian in that they are either also found here as residents or have closely related Indian forms, or visit us during winter.

Correnspondence

Cryptic behaviour of the Rose Ringed Parakeet

29.7.65: Early in the morning I find a Rose-ringed parakeet on the branch of a banyan tree, close to our house. The bird is silent and its movements are slow and careful. It softly 'bites' the base of each leaf-stalk and pass from one tuft of leaves to another. Though such activities as I see now were seen many a time, the meaning of it is never understood. I am inclined to think that it scrapes out a kind of animal or plant growth, too minute for our observation, with its mandibles and licks it in with its fleshy tongue. This cryptic activity of the Rose-ringed parakeets is seen by me in this banyan tree only.

Could any of the readers throw light on this aspect?

T.V. Jose
Colaba, Bombay.

* * * * * * * * * * *

Field Meet

During the field meet on 29th December at Tulsi, we noticed three unusual facts:-

1) The palas, Flame of the Forest, was in bloom much earlier than normally.

2) There was an unusually large congregation of swifts and swallows on the flat near the lake, darting about with great energy.

3) A big cluster of about two thousand ducks floating in the placid centre of the Vihar Lake made one feel that the birds had learnt about the law that shooting is prohibited in this area.

We wished the club owned a telescope, to enable us to have a closer look, because they were beyond the range of binoculars. If the couple of Pochard and Dabchicks on a tiny gulf was any indication the cluster consisted of these as well as pintails and teals.

Last week's Illustrated Weekly had a picture of a blue rock thrush in this area and many of us were eager to see it. However, it did not oblige, but we were amply compensated by the sight of:

a) Black headed cuckoo shrike and the large cuckoo shrike.

b) Quaker babbler and rufous babbler - giving a clear conception of how to distinguish one from the other. Two friends - absolute new comers - got their initiation remarkably well as their tally ran to 51. They were overjoyed and have received ample encouragement to be bird watchers. The five ladies were luckier than the other 18 bird watchers because their car happened to stray a little further towards Tulsi lake and they saw a flock of Black headed Golden Orioles, a fishing eagle and a Brahminy Kite.

We wish the field meet could be organised twice a month for February and March.

S.R. Shah.

Birdwatchers' Field Club of India

A meeting of the Club was held on 4th January, 1969, at the residence of Mr. Zafar Futehally at 5.00 P.M. Nearly 40 members were present.

Proceedings:

1) Dr. Salim Ali was elected Chairman of the meeting.

2) The Honorary Secretary gave a report of the working of the Club. He read out, first of all, the telegram from Mr. R.S. Stewart Melluish, the Madras Regional Editor, which, beautifully timed, arrived on the morning of the meeting. It contained, as usual, a message of cheery encouragement, which put the whole meeting into high good humour.

The Secretary said that if there were a few more people who had such a genuine interest in the progress of the Club we could go very far in a short time. Mr. Melluish had also sent a cheque for Rs.100/= for expenses.

Continuing, the Honorary Secretary said that there was no doubt, the Newsletter had succeeded in creating an interest in birdwatching, and small groups of people in Bombay and other places have started to enjoy looking at birds. Collecting material for the Newsletter every month however remained a problem, and the Honorary Secretary requested members to send in clippings, extracts and articles, and above all reports of their own observations whenever possible. The Newsletter was now in the 9th year, and a glance at the past numbers revealed some very interesting articles. It may be worthwhile bringing these out in book form, suitably edited. The matter was under consideration.

In a previous meeting it had been decided that to save money the Newsletter could be sent out with a waist-band instead of in envelopes, and the covers would be cyclostyled instead of being printed. However, it was found that without an envelope the Newsletter arrived in a very tattered condition, and without a printed cover it looked very shabby.

Deficit for 1968 was around Rs.1,200/= which was covered by the Dynacraft Machine Co. Pvt. Ltd.

There was considerable discussion about the possibility of raising the subscription from Rs.5/= to Rs.10/=, and though the consensus of the meeting was that the subscription should be raised to Rs.10/= there were some persons who felt that for students the 5-rupee rate should be maintained. The procedure that will be followed in future, therefore, is that the subscription will be retained at Rs.5/= but any one who feels well disposed towards the Newsletter can send an additional contribution of Rs.5/=.

It was decided that no change should be made in the office bearers, and in the Editorial Board with the exception that Mr. B.R. Grubh, Senior Research Assistant of the Bombay Natural History Society should be made a member of the Editorial Board.

It was decided that an attempt be made to display the Newsletter at Bookstalls, and Mr. Hasan Tyabji kindly agreed to pursue this matter if a few additional copies of the Newsletter were sent to him every month.

Mr. Vijay Bhat offered to check up with the Post Master General if it was possible to save on postage by registering the Newsletter with the Post Office.

The meeting terminated with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 9—No. 3—1969 March



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Ghana Bird Sanctuary in January 1969

By

Robert B. Grubh

Every keen birdwatcher in India would know about the Sanctuary, and hence no introduction is given. The Bombay Natural History Society's bird banding team (in which I am a member) arrived here on 15th January. The team is expected to band birds at the Ghana Sanctuary till March.

Compared to the previous years, the lake has dried up considerably in several places. There is a large concentration of waterbirds. The usual sights are the painted storks (most of them, as usual, immature during this time of the year), ibises, cormorants, darters, egrets, etc., and migratory and resident ducks. The interesting visitors are the Siberian Cranes, geese, and pelicans. About 55 Siberian cranes reportedly arrived on 13th January, and are expected to stay in the Sanctuary at least a month more. There are some immature birds among them, and are marked from the adults by the patches of brown plumage. Adult Siberian crane is a lovely bird with snow-white plumage all over except the black primaries which contrast beautifully in flight.

Thousands of greylag geese have come this time. Almost in any part of the Sanctuary one can see them in large numbers. The most remarkable behaviour noted in them this year is their extreme tameness. At time one could approach them within 50 feet, and still the birds would not budge! Perhaps this behaviour may be aptly attributed to the temporary halt of duck shooting by the Maharaja of Bharatpur who has the shooting rights in the Sanctuary.

Barheaded geese have not arrived yet in large numbers. They are one of the late visitors, and are expected here during February. Pelicans dont visit this place regularly. However, this year there is a large flock of rosy pelicans — with one or two spottedbilled among them — giving a spectacular

sight. They dont resent close approach. It is exciting to see them so near. The drying lake has provided sufficient area of shallow waters for the pelicans to hunt fish.

An interesting news: Three mallards, a male and two females were observed in the Keoladeo part of the Sanctuary. They were seen in the same area continuously for more than a week. It may be noted that mallard is not a usual visitor to Rajasthan, and has not been seen in the Sanctuary.

Greyheaded lapwing (Vanellus cinereus), a new record for Rajasthan [see J. of Bombay Natural History Society Vol. 65(2)] was seen two days successively. This lapwing resembles the whitetailed lapwing (V. leucurus) to a large extent, but is always distinguishable by the presence of the yellow-and-black bill, and black tail band.

The Forest Department has made some improvements in the Sanctuary. Electrification of the rest house (Shantikutir) is one of the welcome improvements. Mr V. S. Saxena, the present Divisional Forest Officer, is a birdwatcher, and is keenly interested in making this Sanctuary into a good tourist attraction.

Birding at Lucknow

By

Sudhir Vyas

Lucknow, ' The City of Nawabs ', is to me far more interesting in its avifauna than its aritocracy. Situated on the fertile Gangetic Plain, it has the river Gomti flowing through it. In October the Gomti rose suddenly flooding large areas of low-lying land. Those shallow lakes so formed, which are not yet dry, are dessicating badly highly repulsive to the olfactory nerves. But the birds attracted to those lakes are sufficient excuse for a young enthusiastic birdwatcher to brave the stink and exercise his hobby there. I reproduce below the details of a typical morning on one of these lakes.

The chilly air sends a couple of shivers down my spine as I cross the vast playgrounds of La Martinere College (with my eyes glued on a pair of Laggar Falcons overhead) and I ascend the bund that separates the institution from my destination. From the top of this, I survey the landscape before me. Through the mist I see the lake, its edges dark with storks and babool brushwood. Beyond is a vast area interspersed with huge tufts of flowering grasses with the Gomti flowing peacefully through it. A flight of geese honks overhead as I come down to the lake.

A group of 16 painted storks are quite tame, allowing approach to within a decent 50 ft., then fly off and alight near a group of about 120 of their own kinsmen. Two black storks, associating with some whitenecked storks are far more wary, rising through the mist into oblivion.

The ground near the lakes is a living mass of yellow and yellowheaded wagtails both very nondescript and sickly in their winter plumage. A little care, and I can distinctly recognise three races of the white wagtail. Strange to say, M. a. leucopsis has not yet lost its black back. The large pied wagtails consider the marshes taboo and stick to the actual river. The scene in the water is one of bustling activity. Stilts and wood sandpipers are everywhere. Green sandpipers and godwits are by no means rare. Redshanks are much shyer than the rest. Tinty stints appear microscopic before the towering stilts. Little and median egrets leap to and from energetically. An openbill has just caught a snail and seems to be having difficulty in swallowing it. A mighty blacknecked stork stands in the middle of this fish market looking like a grandmother with her kiddies.

As I approach, the first to take alarm is a large egret. A grey heron in the shallows lifts its periscope neck to inquire into the cause of its disturbance; observing me nearby it flies off with a complaining croak. A Did-he-do-it?

takes flight and flies screaming, putting every bird on the alert. Soon the surface of the lake is a mass of fluttering wings. A purple heron flaps out of the reeds. Soon the birds settle, but the little ringed and Kentish plovers are still flying around with the praticoles. A fascinating party of s skimmers flies over disturbing some little cormorants and a darter on a partially submerged tree. A flying darter makes a graceful picture silhoutted against the rising sun. Ducks are usually few here but I can see a few pintail and teal in the water. Widgeon, shoveller and spotbill are also present. Dabchicks bob up and down among the duck. Coots, however, are absent.

A dark bird suddenly erupts glistening blue wings and proclaims itself to be a blue-jay. These are extremely common throughout Lucknow. One a nearby thicket, a ' mixed hunting party ' is busy. Chestnut-bellied nuthatches, Paradise-, verditer- and greyheaded flycatchers, minivets and innumerable warblers flit amongst the leaves. A goldenbacked woodpecker screams from a tree. A Tickell's willow-warbler looks beautiful with its yellow belly. An Orphean warbler flits past my shoulder, nearly brushing my ear. A monitor lizard runs along the ground, and two bustard-quail fly to clear its path. Grey partridges and peafowl call from the scrub near the river.

A villager plods along a dusty track with two bulls, their bells tinkling sweetly. All cattle in this area seem to have a bell round their neck. A huge mixed flock of parakeets erupts from a tree, followed by a grey hornbill and some green pigeons and greyheaded mynas. The reason for this materializes in the shape of a crested serpent eagle which flies past much harried by two luggar falcons.

My attention is attracted toward the river from the banks of which I had unwittingly flushed a little green heron and a yellow bittern feeding in company. The former, more black than green seems to have its breast dark chestnut rather than grey. It scrams tewk-tewk-tewk as it flies. A pair of turtles basking on the trunk of a partially submerged tree jump into the water with loud ' plops '. This frightens a group of stilts, avocets and godwits nearby which fly, their black and white colours gleaming in the sun. I have repeatedly noticed that many stilts are one-legged, What could be the reason for this?

The sun has risen quite high by now and a huge number of common, cliff and wiretailed swallows and bank-martins are skimming over the water. A group of flamingos flies overhead. A vast flock of medium-sized waders (Ruff and Reeve ?) alights in the centre of the lake as a male marsh harrier flies overhead looking surprisingly beautiful for a hawk. This frightens them once more and again pandemonium breaks loose over the lake. A curlew's plaintive cry comes piercing through the mist. Some black and two white ibises take off from a babool tree, probably frightened by a peregrine. They look like midgets before two sarus cranes in the distance.

As it is getting late, I turn homeward. On a peepul tree, a blackheaded oriole and two cuckoo-shrikes feed on berries. As I cross a thicket two stone-curlews fly off suddenly and a brown shrike dives for cover. A kestrel hovers over the La Martiniere grounds and a crested lark begins to sing, as I enter the city and cross the road, dodging a jeep.

Birdwatching in Sasan Gir Forest

By

Lalsinh M. Raol

For us in Saurashtra, the Gir forest is always a very interesting region for birdwatching. The birdlife there is rich both in variety and number. Many species, which are not easily found in other drier parts of the peninsula abound there. In a way the Gir forest is quite unlike the other parts of Saurashtra. It resembles south Gujarat more or less in the flora and fauna. Because of this, the opportunity of visiting the Gir forest is always a pleasant one.

I visited the Sasan Sanctuary in May 1966 in the company of the Yuvraj Saheb of Jasdan. We stayed in the Sasan Guest House for four days from 1st to 5th May. It was very hot there at that time. Some of the birds were in breeding mood and were singing full-throatedly, especially the Magpie Robins. Wherever we went in the forest either in the evening or in the morning, they were sure to be heard on all sides in more or less numbers.

One of the best areas for birdwatching near Sasan is Kapuriagala which is about four miles from the Sasan Guest House. Moving among the big trees and thick shrubs one gets a good idea of a forest. Both the varieties of orioles, i.e. the golden and blackheaded were often heard and seen. Of these, the call note of the former is sweeter. Pairs of magpie robins were met with every now and then. Both the males and females were singing but the male's song was always predominant. Even in the black and white attire the males looked very attractive. Green pigeons and blossomheaded parakeets which are not generally met with in the drier parts of Saurashtra, were often seen. The latter attracted attention by their distinctive calls. Common ioras, spotted doves, large cuckoo-shrikes and jungle babblers were easily seen here but they are not common in other parts of Saurashtra. Whitethroated babblers were heard sometimes but we were able to spot only one as they preferred to skulk in the undergrowth. Thickbilled flowerpeckers were fleeting among the tree-tops and were heard many times. Jungle crows were present even in the compound of the Guest House.

Among the ' beauties ' of the Gir forest, the paradise flycatcher tops the list. It is a joy to see these graceful birds, especially the males with long trailing streamers, darting after the insects in the air or among the foliage. But throughout our stay, we could not come across even a single male with a pure white body and long tail streamers. Only in one male which we saw in Kapuria, the tip of the long tail feathers was white. Otherwise all the males were chestnut. Tickell's blue flycatchers, white-browed fantail flycatchers, grey tits and small or little minivets were sprightly enough to attract one's attention.

As it was the dry season, we did not come across the birds of the waterside very much. The first among these was a blacknecked stork. We saw one Indian darter in the lake formed by the Kamaleshwar Dam. While moving in the Kapuriagala we saw two whitenecked storks flying past overhead. One common sandpiper was seen on the banks of the Hiran. Common and whitebreasted kingfishers occasionally flashed their brilliant colours.

Among the birds of prey we saw the magnificent crested serpent eagles. They very much prefer well-wooded parts. Crested hawk eagles first caught our ears and then the eyes. The call notes of both these eagles are almost likeable. We came across the Honey Buzzard several times but the tawny eagle was sighted only once on the lake of Kamaleshwar dam.

We saw the crested tree swifts, the special bird of the Gir forest so to say, and the jungle quail.

Among the birds not to favour us were the yellow-eyed babblers, the pigmy woodpeckers and the pittas though the last of these were kind enough to announce their presence by call notes. The grey hornbills seemed to have been exterminated from the Gir by poachers.

While driving through the forest, small flocks of peafowl were often met with. Redvented bulbuls, whitethroated munias, ring doves, purple sunbirds, common green bea-eaters were vieing with one another in ubiquitousness. Indian robins, tree sparrows, willow warblers, ashy wren warbler, tree pies and tailor birds were not so prominent. Pied wagtails graced the Hiran by their presence.

A small ditch of dirty water in the bed of the Kapuria was a great source of attraction for birds in the otherwise dry surroundings. A brown flycatcher, a new record for the Gir forest was seen by us among the various insectivorous birds there.

* * * * *

We reproduce below a note on the Brown Flycatcher (Muscicapa latirostris

Raffles) by Lalsinh M. Raol from Vol. 63(3): 751-2 of the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society.

' In March this year while bird watching at Sasan, Gir Sanctuary, in the company of Yuvraj Shri Shivrajkumar of Jasdan, we saw a brown and inconspicuous bird which was identified as a Brown Flycatcher by the Yuvraj. The previous Monsoon had been very poor and almost all the Nullahs were bone-dry. Most of the birds seen by us, including the Brown Flycatcher, were concentrated around a small pool of ten to twelve sq. ft. area beneath the shade of great trees in the otherwise dry bed of Kapuria River, some four miles from Sasan Rest House. As far as I am aware this species has not been recorded earlier from the Gir. -- Lalsinh M. Raol. July 21, 1966.'

From the note reproduced it would appear that the Brown Flycatcher was seen in March 1966 and not in May as stated in the second paragraph of his paper published here. — Eds./

A trip to the Gir Sanctuary

By

Zafar Futehally

On the 7th of December we left by car from Bombay for the Gir Sanctuary. We are not very energetic motorists and so stopped for the first two nights en route with Captain N. S. Tyabji at Baroda. The environs of the Gujarat Oil Refinery where we stayed harbours an enviable collection of birds. Not being a careful note taker (on the principle that note-taking like photography detracts from the pure enjoyment of watching) I cannot make a complete list of what we saw there, but the two species which dominate my memory are the Brahminy or Blackheaded Myna (Sturnus pagodarum) and the Blackwinged Kite (Elanus caeruleus). This myna is not seen around Bombay, and it would be interesting to find out where exactly it draws the line between Gujarat and Maharashtra. Salim Ali in The Book of Indian Birds (6th ed.), p. 29 say that it is found all over India excepting the most arid and also the humid evergreen parts. Among mynas this is the most elegant, its black cap giving it a formal dressy appearance. There were three Blackwinged Kites in the colony and one parachuted down a few feet from us, crashed through a light shrub and emerged with a field mouse dangling from its talons. The other two birds saw their opportunity immediately and pursued it to share the spoils.

Our next stop was in Rajkot, where the hospitable Principal of Rajkumar College, and our Regional Editor, Kumar Shri Lavkumar, gave us a warm welcome. The dust of the journey was soon washed away and we drove up to a river, where the rich effluent of the city provided food for a variety of birds. The most promient sight was a phalanx of Blackwinged Stilts (Himantopus himantopus), and in the slanting light of the evening the shade of every feather could be clearly seen. The straight black bill and the long orange-red legs are most attractive features. The main body feathers are black, grey-brown, and white, and the whole get up is so pleasing that one forgives the unsure manner in which the birds fly with their legs dangling as if the undercarriage had some loose springs. This spot provided a rare opportunity to see several closely related birds together and to comprehend their identities clearly by comparison. A Redshank (Tringa totanus) was standing adjacent to a Reeve (Philomachus pugnax) and the differences between the two birds seen side by side was an aid to memorise their specialities. Similarly the presence of the Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos), the Wood or Spotted Sandpiper (Tringa glareola), and the Marsh (Tringa stagnatilis) and the Green Sandpiper (Tringa ochropus) was most instructive. That excellent book, A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe by Roger Peterson and others says that the Marsh Sandpiper in winter plumage has a very fine straight bill and white face and forehead. The Green Sandpiper has blackish upperparts with a brilliant white rump. In the midst of this avian congregation Lavkumar's sharp eyes spotted an albino sandpiper, and a note from him has come in for the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. There is

always something unpleasant about an aberrant individual in normal surroundings, and I still remember with a certain distaste the sight of albino blackbucks in the Guindy Park in Madras.

On the following day we reached Sasan Gir, and for the next three days though our principal interest was confined to seeing lions and langurs and deer one morning was devoted to birdwatching and this was the pleasantest of all. I was accompanied by Stewart Melluish whose keen vision and meticulous standards act as a much needed brake to my trigger happy identifications. Readers may recall that in Newsletter Vol. 8(3): 4 I had remarked on the aerialdisplays of white-eyed buzzards (Butastur teesa). On this occasion we saw many buzzards but I do not recall hearing their calls: Pit teer, pit teer, which was heard so often last February. When we climbed a ridge however we got a splendid view of a shikra playing about with a harrier, diving, wheeling, circling and tumbling at eye level. It was a glorious spectacle: the dry teak, clad ridges spreading out as far as we could see, contrasted well with the large expanse of blue water, impounded by the Harni Dam. Gir, the last remaining bit of forest in NW. India is well worth preserving even apart from the consideration that it is the only home of a relict population of lions. A beautiful area provides its own justification for perpetual existence. But man, of course, cannot live on beauty alone, and if the habitat has to be preserved for our aesthetic enjoyment the hundreds of Maldharis and agriculturists inside the Gir Sanctuary must be provided with alternative livelihood outside the area. The Gujarat Government is ' seized ' of this important problem.

' Distant recoveries '

Extract from Bird Report: 1967, compiled by Lord Medway, I. C. T. Nisbet and D. R. Wells (The Malayan Nature Journal Vol. 21, Augu. 1968

Within Malaysia, Night Herons again yielded interesting recoveries, slightly extending the known range of dispersion from their breeding colony near Kuala Gula, Perak. For the first time this year the large size rings used on these birds bore a local return address, 'P. O. Box 759, KUALA LUMPUR ', together with the Malay words ' Beri tahu ' and Chinese characters . The response to these rings has been encouraging, particularly in that all recoveries have been reported to us by correspondents writing in either Malay or Chinese.

The distant recovery of a Zebra Dove unexpectedly suggests that this species may perform extensive local movements. With this dove, as with other birds popular as cage pets, it is necessary to interpret recoveries cautiously. The locality of the recovery in the present instance, on the summit of Gunong Brinchang, invites comparison with the many pigeons and doves taken at Fraser's Hill (see below), although no Zebra Doves were included among them.

Most of the bee-eaters were ringed at roosting sites in Penang and Selangor worked by our ringers for the first time this year. So far, recoveries are disappointingly few. The small movements recorded were controls by the University team of their own rings. The different patterns of post-breeding dispersal or migration of these three species of Merops remain obscure.

The most distant recoveries reported were those of the migratory Barn Swallow. Results to date have shown that the breeding range of the population wintering in our area extends over a wide stretch of northeastern Asia, east of longitude 108°E. and north of latitude 37°50'N. The control in Tientsin represents our first record from China, and makes a story as dramatic as any in bird ringing.

The Bar Swallow concerned (ring number 013.22977) was first ringed by the University of Malaya tea in Karak, Pahang, on 31st Jan., 1967, with a ring bearing the return address, P. O. Box 3443, Hong Kong. This swallow was subsequently retrapped by the same ringers at the same place, on 16th

roundings, and I still remember with a certain distaste the sight of these blackbucks in the Guindy Park in Madras.

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..... 7

its northern breeding grounds. On retrapping, it was found to be carrying a second ring, most ingeniously formed from a narrow strip cut from the edge of a thin metal sheet (? aluminium) originally painted white on one side. On the painted side, our unknown cooperator had scratched with great delicacy the four characters: 中国天津 , i. e. China, Tientsin. He had then rolled his strip round the swallow's leg, with the writing outside.

ICTN has pointed out that the character ' country, i. e. 国 , is written as the abbreviated form in use in mainland China, not 國 as common in Taiwan, nor the unabbreviated 國 most invariably used by Malaysian Chinese. Even without this calligraphic evidence, we see no reason to suspect a hoax. If these words ever come to the attention of our bellow bird-ringer in Tienstin, we offer warmest thanks and congratulations for his contribution.

A number of additional records from North Korea have been reported this year, again by Dr Won Hong Koo, of the National Academy of Sciences, Pyongyang. Unfortunately, at the time of going to press, only the ring numbers concerned have been passed to us. Further details of the recoveries, if they become known, will be published later.

Within the winter range of the Barn Swallow, many returns of our own rings have been recorded in three towns of Bentong, Karak and Raub, where most trapping has been carried out. These records (details of which will be published later) indicate that many Barn Swallows return in successive years to their same wintering ground. Despite the equally intensive winter banding of this swallow in Bangkok, only a limited exchange between the two areas is demonstrated.

The second swallow using urban power lines as a night roost is the resident Pacific Swallow. Again this year (cf. 1966 Report), the recovery of a breeding bird is evidence that the roosting population is drawn from the immediately surrounding countryside.

Notes and Comments

The following extract from Habitat Vol. 4, No. 10 published by the Council for Nature, 1968, shows the deep interest which the British have in ornithology. Observation of this type indicated in this exercise requires constant application and outings under unfavourable weather conditions. It is time to remind ourselves that our own projects about studying the migratory movements of Rosy Pastors, and Life-history of House Sparrow have not made much progress. Let us resolve afresh to do our duty taking inspiration from what is being done abroad.

' The British Trust for Ornithology News, in its August number, announces that the recently launched atlas project (' Habitat ' vol. 4, no. 3) has now found finance which will ensure its completion; the Leverhulme Trust Fund will make grants totalling £11,720 over a period of 5½ years. Provision for a full-time organiser and for printing and clerical expenses etc. is assured, and an appointment will be announced in due course. The aim of the project, the BTO points out with emphasis, is to show which species of bird bred in each 10 km. square in the course of a five year period. The launching of the scheme has already encouraged observers to cover areas and habitats to which they have paid little or no attention in the past, and much new and valuable information is expected to come in. Cards can be provided for local county organisations who whish to keep a record for themselves of all the data collected under the atlas scheme. '

* * *

People interested in serious Natural History will be glad to hear that an Ecology Bookshop has been opened at 45 Lower Belgrave Street, London, to

bring together books covering the complex relationships between man, animal, plant, soil and environment. Those wishing to be sent book lists should send their name and address to the same address (Proprietors: Vincent Stuart and John M. Watkins Limited, Publishers and Booksellers).

* * *

The Rajkot branch of the Bird Club of India is certainly commendably active as the following report will indicate:

The annual meeting was held on 9th February 1969 at the Secretary Shukla's residence.

All the active members were present. Those veterans, Shril B. M. Shukla, Shri L. M. Raol, and Shri S. G. V. Rao who have been scattered all over Gujarat were greatly missed. Whereas it was disappointing to note that the number had not increased during the year, it was heartening to have the hard core functioning with great vigour and Jadav, Pandya, and Sukla were commended for their active birdwatching.

Among the interesting birds recorded were Indian skimmers (Rynchops albicollis), Caspian Terns (Hydroprogne caspia), Little Indian Pratincoles (Glareola lactea) and a white phase of the Spotted Sandpiper (Tringa glareola). Strikland's chat (Oenanthe cpistholeuca) was again notes this winter for the second year.

A noteworthy record has been the discovery of a small colony of Large Indian Pratincoles (Glareola maldivarum) breeding on Lalpari lake in June.

It was noted with satisfaction that Redwattled Lapwings (Vanellus indicus), Blackwinged Stilts (Himantopus himantopus), Little Ring Plovers (Charadrius dubius) had successfully bred on Rajkot lakes despite the low water level of the water and the delayed monsoon.

The Editor and his family was received with pleasure in December when they passed through Rajkot on their way to the Gir Sanctuary.

It was also with pleasure that the information of the imminent publishing of the second volume of Dr Salim Ali's and Dr Ripley's monumental work on the avifauna was received, and the Secretary was asked to extend the Club's good wishes to Dr Salim Ali.

Three of the Club's school boy members, Kishor Kadiwan, Lalit Patel and Shashikant Kakkad, will be leaving shortly after completing their schooling and it was hoped that they will continue their interests in birds.

K. S. Lavkumar was elected President and Shri P. J. Pandya was elected as the Secretary of the Rajkot branch of the Club for the year 1969.

Shri P. J. Pandya proposed a vote of thanks to the outgoing Secretary Shri B. K. Shukla for having kept the flesh and bones of the little group together. It was felt that he deserved a rest to recoup his energies to serve the Club more effectively in years to come.

The meeting terminated with a vote of thanks to K. S. Lavkumar for his guidance throughout the year.

Correspondence

Turnstone (Arenaria interpres): Why interpres?

In his most interesting ' Flamingo-hunter's Journal, part three, in the Newsletter of January 1969, Mr Stewart Melluish refers to the Turnstone's scientific name and asks ' Why interpres? '

There is a book by R. D. Macleod entitled Key to the Names of British

Birds, which is most useful to those of us whose classical education has either been neglected or forgotten. (In my case, both!) It is also relevant to many of the birds of India. I quote from the heading Arenaria:

' Arenaria Brisson. Fem. of Latin arenarius, sand-; arena, sand. The Turnstone is found mainly on rocky and pebbly shores, but, outside the br breeding season, on sandy flats as well. A. interpres interpres (Linnaeus), turnstone. Latin interpres, usually meaning ' interpreter ' or ' go-between', but here apparently ' tell-tale ', with reference to the alarm note with which it warns other birds of the approach of danger. '

Not very convincing, perhaps, but a possible explanation.

R. McL. Cameron
Hon. Secretary, Ceylon Bird Club

Some Suggestions

Here are suggestions for consideration:

1. Bharatpur Sanctuary: The charges for boarding and lodging there are Rs20/- a day. This is very expensive for birdwatchers. The matter may be taken up with the authorities concerned and special facilities, e. g. allowing birdwatchers to cook their own meals may be secured for a recognised birdwatcher or a member of the Bombay Natural History Society in case the stay is for 5 days or more.

2. The type of information given in January Newsletter in ' Bird Life of Pokhara ', viz. time of the year and the exact points or places where one should watch out for birds is very welcome for guidance. Such information may be given frequently in our Newsletter. I had been to Pokhara but saw practically no birds or very few birds. The article has given me the idea of revisiting Pokhara.

Quite a number of birdwatchers go to Kashmir, Garhwal, Himachal Pradesh, etc. Such information may induce them to include such places in their itinerary.

3. Whenever ornithologists plan a birdwatching trip, the information may be given in the Newsletter so that those desirous of availing the opportunity of having the advantage of expert guidance can contact them and make their own arrangements to meet them at the point, provided they are no nuisance to them.

4. Information about bird sanctuaries may be given from the view point of birdwatchers, i.e. best time of the year and species expected to be seen.

5. Two day trips, to places rich in birdlife, e. g.

Sept. 14th and 15th.
Oct. 19th and 20th
Nov. 9th and 10th or three day trips, e. g.
Feb. 28th and 1st March (No holiday) and 2nd may be organized well in advance by collecting estimated unrefundable expenses, should be arranged.

S. R. Shah

Vihar (Aarey)

Today (5th January 1969) we were at Vihar (Aarey), and collected a rich harvest of observations.

We noted that a number of cars were driven over the flats up to the

vicinity of the island. Perhaps it will be advisable to barricade the dust road.

We also noticed a beer bottle floating in the shallow part of the lake and heard a young man giving instructions that bottles be collected from the lake and filled with liquor. Illicit distillation in the protected area?!

Though we did not hear the familiar sound of the felling of trees, quite some headloads of firewood were being removed. There was a great variety of birds and we identified the following:

Common and Jungle crow; black, whitebellied, and racket-tailed drongo, tree pie; goldenbacked and Mahratta woodpecker; green and blue rock pigeon (latter only heard); Tickell's flowerpecker and blue flycatcher; magpie robin; Indian roller; blackheaded oriole (heard); large and small cormorant; white wagtail; coot; duck; common swallow; coppersmith; tailor bird; redwattled lapwing; egrets; hoopoe; rufousbacked shrike; rose ringed parakeet; common myna; shikra (heard); common gree bee-eater; gulls and terns; snipe; stint; redvented, redwhiskered and whitebrowed bulbul (latter heard); jungle babbler; ashy grey wren warbler; purplerumped sunbird; vulture; and osprey (?).

The coral trees were in full bloom, but there were only mynas and sunbirds drinking the nectar, no rosy pastors.

Amin Tyabji

Season of Flycatchers

It is always exciting to see a strange bird; but most exciting it is to see a flycatcher. And excited we were to see four species of them in a short time.

Recently these flycatchers haunted our backyard in a period of a little over a month. First, on the 27th September a female Paradise Flycatcher found its way into our backyard. It hung about the place from 8 in the morning to 5 in the evening, flitting from tree to tree, catching insects. There was not a sign of the bird anywhere on the following day. The bird, however, reappeared on the morning of 3rd October. As a result of heavy rain overnight the air was teeming with insects, and the bird had a busy time catching them.

The next day the bird was accompanied by a Redbreasted Flycatcher, and they hunted together for some time (the former mostly caught dragonflies). The Redbreasted left the place in the morning, while the Paradise, lingered there until late in the evening. We wonder why the male Paradise Flycatcher does not come along with the female; we have yet to see the male.

A Fantail Flycatcher next visited our backyard on 22nd October. We identified it very easily by its characteristic fanned-out tail, but on observing it closely we found some difference. The colour of its head and neck was blue, merging into the white underparts, and it has a definite crest of the same colour. There was no breast band. This might be due to the fact that it was still a young bird. The bird first appeared at 9 a.m. and spent all day flitting from tree to tree after the typical flycatcher fashion.

A Tickell's Blue Flycatcher visited us last on 29th October. It was a fine specimen fully matured. There was nothing interesting about it for it was a quiet bird. It mostly kept to the denser portions of trees, and only occasionally exposed itself to us.

V. Ravi
President, Nature Study Club, Guntur

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 9—No. 4—1969 April



FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 9, No. 4 April 1969

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Birdwatching around Visakhapatnam

K. S. R. Krishna Raju

On 20 September 1968, I went on holiday to my native-place, Alamanda R.S., a village in the Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. The southwest monsoon had failed, and the scene from the ' bus was largely one of dying vegetation. Here and there by the side of the road the water-holes still had a little water in them, and would usually have contained some meditative egrets and herons, but I saw nothing on this occasion. Lack of rains had deprived them of food; and even without such a natural hazard, their numbers are rapidly diminishing. Unless preventive measures are taken quickly against the indiscriminate use of poisons like endrine, and of shot guns, such birds as herons, egrets, and also doves, which appear to be the most conspicuous casualties, will become scarcer and scarcer.

The area around my native-place comprises both wet and dry lands, more or less dependent on the monsoon, surrounded by low hills with light scrub as well as the denser foliage of mango gardens and palm groves. This mixed vegetation is a suitable home for numerous species of birds and other small animals like porcupines, jackals, hares, and wild boar. It is indeed a paradise for the birdwatcher. The day after my arrival, at about four in the afternoon, I went for a walk in a mango grove with my cousin. The first thing that attracted our attention were the shrill calls of Redvented Bulbuls that were hopping from tree to tree. The flock consisted of both young and adults. I counted 23 of them. With them were Common Mynas, but no Redwhiskered Bulbuls. On an acacia tree we saw a single Whitebrowed Bulbul. Just then a tiny little balck bird caught our eye, with a white patch on its wing conspicuous in flight. This was a male Indian Robin. A few seconds later, the ashy brown hen, with no white wing patch, appeared on the scene.

We went farther in to the middle of the mango garden and were at once surrounded by a varied multitude of birds — munias, minivets, sunbirds, babblers, parakeets and flowerpeckers. Of these the most numerous were Scarlet Minivets, Small Minivets and Tickell's Flowerpeckers, the minivets dominating the scene with their brilliant plumage and calls. Jungle and Common Babblers were the babblers most in evidence, though we saw one or two of the Yellow-eyed species too. Purple-rumped Sunbirds, Blackheaded Munias and Spotted Munias were also about, in strength. All

these birds formed a single flock, enjoying each other's company. What a harmonious life they seem to lead! Even though they belong to different species there appears to be no caste and creed barriers between them, as there are amongst human beings. There seem to be no political or other petty quarrels in the avian kingdom. As Wordsworth says, ' let nature be your teacher ', and obviously man has yet to learn many things from nature, especially the art of peaceful co-existence.

A few minutes later we came across a flock of Roseringed Parakeets. Alexandrine or Large Indian Parakeets were also to be seen, but in fewer numbers. On one mango tree we saw a couple of Goldenbacked Woodpeckers pecking for insects on the lower branches. Both of them were females, having the characteristic all-black forecrown stippled with white. Coming out of the grove, we saw on some telegraph wires a pair of Spotted Doves. Even in the middle of Visakhapatnam, with all its hustle and bustle, they are to be seen in the trees, sending forth their curious calls as if to draw themselves to the attention of the public. There is a legend that if one of a pair of Spotted Doves is shot dead, the other bird will never pair with a new mate. We cannot verify this legend, but should not be surprised if it were true and that these birds do possess such a moral sense.

Next, on a banyan tree, we saw three pairs of Koels along with a silent Brainfever Bird and two Golden Orioles.

Now I shall conclude with some miscellaneous observations of mine made at various times and places in Visakhapatnam district that may be of interest.

In the village of Alamanda I have noticed a couple of Green Bee-eaters and a Roller which curiously enough each alighted on the same perch and at the same times for four days running. The Bee-eaters arrived punctually at 3.45 p. m. and the Roller at 4.10. Emerging from the mango grove from the same direction they perched at the same spot on some wires for a few minutes and flew back into the garden. This exactly repeated routine may have been a mere coincidence, and the birds may not have been the same individuals, but if so it is remarkable.

I have been disappointed to see that Jerdon's Chloropsis, once common enough, has almost disappeared from the region during the last two years. The local people catapult them and make them into cage birds. I have only seen one recently: on 20 October 1968, in the outskirts of the village of Bheemali in a solitary mango tree, along with Whitebellied Drongos and Scimitar Babblers.

One of the konda doras (hill-tribesmen) in Chittivanipalem, a village on the Eastern Ghats in S. Kota taluk, told me last year that he shot a Peafowl while it was incubating its eggs. Out of curiosity, I asked him about the incubation being done by a male bird, instead of the hen. In reply he said that he was very confident that it was a male that he had shot, and that it was on a nest with 4 eggs. I can only take his word for it but it requires some more authentic report to test the veracity of this fact.

On a sunny morning, I noticed a solitary Black Drongo applying red ants to its body, beneath the wings. It had picked up 5-6 ants and carefully attached them to its body. After leaving them a few minutes, it started picking them off and eating them. Probably the idea was to use its prey to get rid of lice and other parasites before feeding on it.

More recently, on 25 October in Visakhapatnam, I observed the strange phenomenon of copulation in a pair of House Sparrows. It was a rainy day and a few minutes after the rain a pair of them landed on a parapet wall. The female birdswas shaking terribly; at once the male bird climbed onto her and for a few seconds copulated with her and then got down and hopped a few paces, calling softly. But the female bird remained standing where she was, rooted to the spot, still shivering. The male bird again crouched on the hen's back, turning his tail downwards while the hen raised hers. Each time they took exactly 5-6 seconds, and after an interval of 5 seconds, repeated the same process. In this way they copulated nine times, till the female stopped shivering.

Other birds I have seen on trips to different parts of Visakhapatnam district include Pied and Whitebreasted Kingfishers, House and Palm Swifts, Common and Greyheaded Mynas (the Hill Myna is reported to occur in the ghat regions of the district), Large Cuckoo-Shrikes, Hoopoes, Grey Hornbills, Skylarks, Ring Doves, Whitebacked and King Vultures, Spotted Owlets, Red-wattled Lapwings, Grey Partridges, Bus-

tard-Quail, Coucals, Lorikeets and Crimsonbreasted Barbets. Finally, I must not forget the crows and the Little Grebe that is always such a pleasure to watch as it suddenly disappears into the water, leaving a series of shallow rings on the surface of the water.

The observations will, I trust, give our readers a glimpse of the avifauna of Visakhapatnam district.

The Pitta that came to stay

S. V. Nilakanta

My finger was nipped for my troubles. I was more surprised than hurt. This plucky nip that the Pitta gave me also encouraged me a great deal. Otherwise it has been my experience that injured or sick birds just sulk silently and resign themselves to inevitable death. The bird may not know that it is going to die, but I do. Some sort of an emotional attachment is developed between the dying creature and the younger members of my family. After a couple of days of frantic nursing, a quick burial is arranged before the house is fully awake.

This is a different sort of story and it is hoped that one day there will be an interesting sequel to it.

On the first of November the Pitta of our story was caught by a cat. As it so often happens, domestic cats and dogs are able to hold a bird in their mouth without doing the victim great harm. It is the usual practice for cats to allow the victim to escape for a moment and catch it again. Anyhow this Pitta was rescued from the cat by Mrs Contractor of Juhu. The bird was housed in a very large cage.

No one really knew what to give the bird for feeding. The bird would not take notice of anything placed in the cage. The bird was passed on the next day to Mr Zafar Futehally who in turn brought it to me. On the evening of the 2nd November the same cage was brought from Mrs Contractor who stays quite close to my residence.

After placing the bird in its cage a short discussion was held. It was felt that as far as possible we should simulate natural conditions of habitat. Therefore we spread leaves at the bottom of the cage and also provided a substantial perch. The cage was kept in a quiet place and covered with a dark cloth to enable the bird to relax.

Later the bird was taken out and it was then that the bird quite purposefully bit my finger. The bill of the Pitta is provided with a very sharp downcurved point on the upper mandible but this was not used for biting me. Neither then nor in the next few days was I able to understand the purpose of this sharp tip.

It was quite easy to soothe the bird and feed it with milk and water. A small pellet of dough about one centimetre in diameter was given. A little butter had been added in kneading the dough. The bird was able to retain this feed. At this stage there was no point in forcing luck and feeding the bird any more. There was a constant fear of the bird regurgitating the contents of its stomach.

Immediately after this meagre meal, the bird which had till then been on the floor of the cage, climbed on to its perch and went to sleep.

The next morning was a Sunday and any attempt to sleep late was spoilt by the noise of the Pitta jumping up and down from its perch. Some water and some boiled macaroni was force-fed. The idea was that macaroni may be connected with worms. The bird thoroughly disliked the macaroni. An hour later, when we had our breakfast, some white from a fried egg was given. This was greatly relished by the bird. Each time the bird was caught, it would face the hand and look defiantly. The next move was to spread out its wings and tilt them forward in a posture of defiance. This prominently brought into display the white spots on its bright wings. When this threatening posture failed, the offending forefinger of my hand was caught and nipped. For every feed, including water, the bill had to be forced open and the substance placed well into the throat. It was noticed that the inside of the mouth was yellow, and this made me suspect that the bird was a young one.

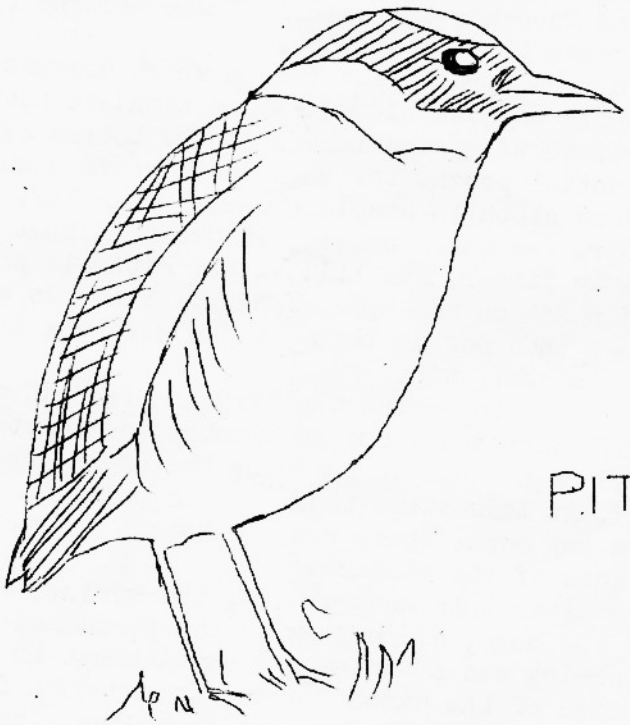
By Sunday afternoon the bird had fed well and was quite energetic. It had been measured and banded on its left leg. The cage was taken to the side of the house and the door was opened. The bird flew straight out

for a few metres and then alighting, hopped away, all the time looking at me over its left shoulder. This part of my compound is overshadowed by a large pipal tree. Actually this is a narrow corridor between my house and my neighbour's. At the end of this corridor and adjoining the back fence is a large clump of lantanas.

Nobody saw the Pitta for one day. On the next day which was a Tuesday, the bird was seen several times. As it was wearing a conspicuous metal ring there was no doubt about the identification. The bird was generally under the lantana bush where the ground was infested with red ants. At six o'clock in the evening, the bird was probably looking for a suitable roost and was seen flying. It flew into our verandah, which is partly enclosed, and caused some excitement. After sitting for a short while on our front door step, the bird took off and went to roost on a drumstick tree. It had selected a branch about four metres from the ground. Late at night I was able to spot it with an electric torch. Before going to sleep it gave out its characteristic double whistle or call.

In the next few weeks this bird was always to be found, under the pipal tree, either in my compound or at our neighbour's. Much of its time was spent in looking for tiny insects, probably ants. At no time did any of us see it eat a worm or large insect. Every evening, without fail, it gave out its double call but never again roosted in a conspicuous place.

A few days after the Pitta took up its residence with us, some Blackbirds (Turdus merula) arrived. These are winter visitors to our compound. Like other winter visitors, the Blackbirds are extremely shy in the first week or two. Much time was spent by the Blackbirds in feeding in the same territory as the Pitta. Both birds feed only on the ground and probably eat the same insects. There seemed to be plenty to eat. The Pitta stayed with us for the whole month of November and just vanished one fine day. It is supposed to be a great wanderer and we hope to see it again. Meanwhile the Blackbirds are thriving and seem to get plenty to eat.



According to the books this Blackbird is known as Turdus merula which is the same name given to the European Blackbird. Actually, I find it very difficult to see much resemblance between these two birds of the same species! They are of different subspecies. The male European bird is a bold black fellow and sings loudly with a clear fluty voice. The legs are black. The Indian bird is a timid creature, sooty grey with a blacker head and the call is a weak high-pitched screech. The legs are yellow.

Again the female of the European bird is brown with a mottled throat and breast and does not resemble the male. The female of the Indian bird resembles the male except that she is more ashy brown in colour. Like in the case of other animals the European bird is larger. Expert taxonomists must be knowing a lot more than the casual bird-

A Beginner Birdwatcher in Chanda

(Mrs) Neela D'Souza

Chana isn't much of a town, whichever way you look at it. An unkind friend did not exaggerate when he said the best glimpse of Chanda was from the Grand Trunk Express, speeding away to Madras or Delhi — take your choice, just as long as Chana is left behind!

Most people don't even know where Chanda is and are amazed to learn it is in Vidarbha, in eastern Maharashtra. A few, keen on shikar, brighten up at the mention of Chanda and recognize it as famous tiger country. ' Did you go shooting? ' they ask and are visibly disappointed to hear that neither of us shoots. In fact, in the year and more that we spent there, we saw neither tiger nor panther, although nearly every one of our colleagues came back after every trip out of Chanda — my husband used to make 40 to 60 mile trips twice weekly to the forest area south of Chanda where he was resettling refugees from East Pakistan, but not a sign of anything larger than a frightened rabbit or fox — with exciting stories of panthers crossing the road, lying in full view of headlights, at night, early afternoon, 7 in the morning, practically any time of the day when we were not on the road. ' You must have luck to sight big game,' they would tell us with smug superiority.

There were no amusements here, no library or cinema or any other form of entertainment; one depended on one's own resources for relaxation. Here was an ideal climate to develop new interests. And so I discovered that Chanda more than compensated for all its drawbacks — the dust, the deplorable sanitation, the absence of company as practically every other wife had stayed behind in civilization for the sake of the children, the heat — by its beautiful birds.

Birdwatching in Chanda began as new interest for my three-year old daughter Meena and me. To start with, the bulbul was about the only bird I could identify, and the redvented variety was very common here. In the still of the morning, the first sound one heard was its joyous whistle as it determinedly attacked all the fruit on our one custard apple tree. Between the bulbul and the friendly squirrels we hardly got one for ourselves and had to be content with the neighbour's description of how unusually sweet and juicy were the fruit of that particular tree.

There was one morning of total enchantment when each of the zinnias that stood in a circle outside the house had a bulbul and a yellow-cheeked tit, both in full song, perched on it. If you are ever puzzled by Yeats's phrase, ' bird loud ', that morning was a melodious demonstration of its aptness. I read somewhere recently that as bird calls are the most restful and relaxing sounds in the world, a Tokyo hotel offers a room radio service so that overwrought visitors can tune into rest and relaxation with a selection of bird calls. Imagine, Chanda provided this service free — to everyone!

The tamarind that occupied a corner of our compound and spread its shade over the road and the neighbour's garden, was patricularly lovely old tree and a pair of orioles seemed to favour it just as much as we did. Quiet afternoons in Chanda were full of the liquid warbling of the orioles and they made a splendid splash of colour against the dark foliage. Meena pronounced the oriole her favourite bird and quickly learnt to identify its plumage and call. The coucal, usually shy and quick to hide, was also fond of the tamarind and his deep, throaty chuckle as he hopped clumsily among the lower branches added a touch of mystery to Chanda afternoons.

This was the time when I acquired Salim Ali's book of Indian birds and was given a longed-for pair of binoculars, although there was fierce competition for both from the children. Malcolm MacDonald's colourful book about the birds in his Delhi garden was added to our store to Meena's delight, as she thoroughly approved of her favourite bird being given pride of place in the frontispiece. I wish I could have read to her his enthusiastic description of the golden oriole: ' No Emperor was ever more regally robed. From head to toe he is golden-yellow except for a black stripe through each eye, black central tail feathers and almost completely black wings. Here is masculine beauty at its boldest. ' industriously pecking around in the sparse grass of the lawn we were

Meena was fascinated one morning by a pair of busy hoopoes

struggling to grow. She watched them open and close their crests and was almost shaken for her allegiance to the oriole but decided that the hoopoe deserved second place in her affections.

The Naginabag Christian Mission Compound at the end of our road was the sad ruin of what must have once been a lovely park. There are tall trees here and shady walks and grassy stretches, now overgrown in parts and neglected everywhere. But birds haunt the Compound and any time I strolled in I could be sure of being rewarded. Right near the gate was a woodpecker whose raucous laugh reminded me of the song of long-forgotten days and if as a child I wondered whether a woodpecker — and a woody one at that — really laughed in quite such a jolly fashion, the time I heard him in Chanda removed any lingering doubts. He had his nest near a fork high up on the tree and walked up and down jauntily, and laughed to himself as he flew away on some amusing errand.

The fantail fly-catcher with his incredibly sweet seven-note song which sounded like ' sing-a-little-song-again ' also loved the Compound. The first time I heard him I was sure it was someone whistling and stopped and looked around. And then I caught sight of him, opening and shutting his little fan in waltz-time, warbling as he danced from branch to branch. The fly-catcher is one of the nicest and most satisfying memories of Chanda.

Meena went to a nursery school in the Mission Compound from where I fetched her home at lunch time. Every day we noticed a drongo on the overhead telegraph wires, perched in the identical spot. By now Meena could recognize a drongo and was intrigued by its unfailing appearance daily, at the same place. To add to her interest she discovered little red seeds at this spot and every day found one or two more. She was quite convinced that the drongo dropped the seeds there on purpose for her, and the idea of being singled out for these favours quite appealed to her. This led to her making up a series of charming stories about the drongo.

One morning, just after a heavy storm, we discovered a nightjar in a little lean-to (which in the past had been used for storing firewood) on one side of our courtyard. It was hurt and looked at us with sad, frightened eyes. We picked it up and kept it warm in a basket and sent for our veterinary officer who arrived promptly in a jeep. He examined it and took it away to his dispensary but warned that the bird could hardly survive the gaping wound in its side. It died the next day.

Although we walked every evening in Chanda, there were only two alternatives. One was to take the path to the graveyard and we took this with unfailing regularity until we discovered we could head in quite a different direction and walk to the river. Which we did every day after that. On the thorny bushes that served as hedges between the fields we noticed a number of nests of weaver birds and watched their comings and goings through the binoculars. I determined to acquire a nest after the breeding season was over, but someone unhappily read my thoughts for the next day we found the hedge had been cut down and the branches lay scattered on the ridges between the fields. We managed to extricate a nest with some difficulty. I was quite excited as I carried it home and even more so when a faint cheep announced the presence of a bird in the nest. We hung it up in the spare room but though I peered into the opening I did not see the inhabitant till next morning when he emerged, looking decidedly unhappy. He was able to fly a short distance but since we doubted he could fend for himself we decided to keep him for a few days till he was stronger. We left him at liberty in the room and I fed him bits of food and crumbs which he accepted quite readily. Any time I approached the nest I got a fit of sneezing and my arms and face began to itch; only later I learnt about symbiosis and the tiny insect that inhabits these nests, effectively keeping out intruders — and added a new word to my vocabulary and more information to my store of knowledge about birds.

This little <u>baya</u> survived and grew increasingly restive and energetic; after a few days of being attended to he grew familiar enough to bite my finger quite hard when offered a crumb. One morning I noticed that he kept his eyes shut although he changed his perch frequently; the same evening I found him on the floor — dead. There was really no explanation for this but much later — not that the information would have helped had I had it earlier — I read somewhere that this shutting of eyes or simulation of sleep is an indication that the bird is about to die.

Bee-eaters were everywhere in Chana, circling around on outstretched motionless wings, like miniature paper kites, and swooping down in a fantastic display of aerial acrobatics. The neem tree in the courtyard suddenly became a popular roosting place for the bee-eaters and evenings were full of noisy chatter as they huddled in groups of four or five, pushing close to each other. This was an amusing habit and latecomers would invariably try to push into an already tight little clique and either displace another or fall off themselves; this would go on till every one was satisfactorily seated. The courtyard was discoloured with their droppings and their choice of tree was unfortunate because our cl clothes were hung to dry directly below and the oily black stains were hard to get rid of. We tried shaking the branches, prodding them with a pole, shouting and, I am sorry to add, even shooting, but nothing would induce the bee-eaters to leave. Finally we used a catapult and they took flight, never to return. I rather missed them.

On the river bank we saw herons, once a black ibis, kingfishers, plovers, shrikes and wagtails. The paddy bird struck us by his drabness and we never failed to marvel at his beautiful white wings in flight, in such utter contrast to his dull stationary self. Later when I read EHA's book on Common Birds of India, I noticed particularly that he remarked how the paddy bird ' suddenly produces a pair of snowy wings from his pockets and flaps away! '

Walking back from the river was always a delight, with the first stars twinkling in the fading light — stars are ever so much brighter in the districts where the expanse of sky uncluttered by buildings and neon lights is so much greater -- and the lapwing asking wistfully did-he-do-it across the ripening fields.

Extract

Extract

Below is an extract from notes on Sikkim birds by J. A. Gammie, which appeared in Vol. 5 of Stray Feathers in 1877 (p. 383). Gammie was a botanist and occasionally contributed notes on birds in Stray Feathers and Ibis. Collyrio nigriceps referred to in the passage is the race of the Rufousbacked Shrike now known by the name Lanius schach tricolor - Ed.

'. Collyric nigriceps often regales us with a pretty, though rather feeble, song from these dead tops, and many other birds are regular frequenters of them. The moral of all this is: never cut away a dead tree top if you wish to do the birds a good turn. Man is far too ready to take it for granted that everything in this world has been made for his sole use and benefit and to act in a cruel and inconsiderate manner towards what he is pleased to call the lower members of the animal kingdom. Not very long ago I heard a high official, of an imaginative turn of mind, wonder why there should be inaccessible ravines filled with trees where they could be of no earthly use that he could see, quite overlooking the evident fact that the world was not made for the exclusive use of mankind. I was not so rude as to say so, but I thought " were you a Hornbill, or Bear, or Monkey, or even a wild Pig, you would wonder why there should be any other sort of places. " These inaccessible spots now provide more food, and safer breeding places for many birds and other animals than all the gentle slopes put together. '

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Review

BIRD GUIDE OF THAILAND, by Dr Boonsong Lekagul. Bangkok. 304 pages, 94 half-tone plates, most of them in colour. Copies obtainable from the author, c/o The Association for the Conservation of Wildlife, 4 Old Custom Lane, Bangrak, Bangkok, at $7.50, plus $1.00 for postage outside Thailand.

This is a compact little guide to the identification of the 830-odd species of birds to be seen in Thailand, modelled on the famous Roger Tory Peterson field guides to American birds. All the species are illustrated in colour, and notes on each facing or conveniently near their plates give the English, scientific and Thai names (in Thai and Roman script), the bird's size, a short description, and a comment on its status.

Dr Lekagul is to be warmly congratulated on what is clearly a remarkable achievement. He is not a professional ornithologist: he practises medicine. In spite of the obvious richness of its avifauna Thailand is not a country where birdwatchers are thick on the ground; so although Dr Lekagul has had the benefit of using H. G. Deignan's Checklist of the Birds of Thailand there cannot have been a great body of published literature on Thai birds and the author's task in collecting data for this guide must have been prodigious. But he has not merely found enough spare time to produce the material for the text : he has done the illustrations himself, too — painted 829 birds in full colour! Being an occasional painter of birds myself I know something of the agonies of the wretched business and I can only regard Dr Lekagul with profound respect and admiration. It could fairly be said that his drawing is of uneven quality: he is more at home, generally speaking, with the passerine birds — babblers, thrushes, flycatchers, and so on — than, say, with the owls, ducks and Laridae, but diagrammatic though they are most of his birds are convincing enough and there can be no doubt that they will be an enormous help to the field watcher in Thailand and neighbouring countries. If we had a guide of this kind in India it would ease our lives considerably, and Thai birdwatchers are fortunate. Indeed, many Thai birds are on the Indian list and this book might well be useful here.

One particularly satisfactory feature of the book are six pages devoted to black and white plates showing the undersides of raptors in flight, and another two of waders. It is really pitiful how many illustrated books claiming to be practical guides to field identification are published year after year without such obviously useful diagrams. Dr Lekagul has not neglected the needs of the field observer so inconsiderately.

His whole enterprise is, in fact, highly creditable, and deserves both praise and success — especially the latter, as the investment in making such a large number of blocks (presumably the author's own) must have been great. It is consequently a little disheartening that his work has been marred in places by poor typographical lay-out and design, proof-reading and editing, and while some of the plates are fine others are not as good as they might have been because the blocks have been made badly or the printing is unsatisfactory. It is to be hoped that the book will sell out and be reprinted better, for at present its appearance does not consistently attain the best international standard, and does not do justice to its author and illustrator.

There are also some oddities in the text which could perhaps be set right. I mention only two. Dr Lekagul wisely sticks to binomials, and it is possible that Thai races of common Indian birds do in some c cases differ substantially from those we are familiar with here. If this is so the Indian must be wary of some of the descriptions in this book. But I am inclined to think that it is merely an error to describe the Whiskered Tern, Chlidonias hybridus, as ' black with white cheek ' in summer plumage. Only the cap and the belly can be called black, surely? The rest of the bird is largely grey, paling to white below the cap. Again, the Black Ibis, Pseudibis papillosa, is said to have ' head, neck and long curved bill black ', while the plate shows a whitish band from throat to hindcrown. This in itself is puzzling enough. But the typical race has red warts on the top of the head. Is there really a Thai race without these?

R. A. S. M.

The Gilbert Memorial Nature Study Club

We are a group of students who have recently associated ourselves as a club and named it after Mr Gilbert White — ' The Gilbert Memorial Nature Study Club '. At present we are fifteen in strength. I am very glad to inform you that the enthusiasm created by your Newsletter among our members is great, and many of them are now interested in birds. We wish to have the blessing of Naturalists like you.

Our members want to have old copies of the Newsletter, and if available we will pay the cost as prescribed by you in advance.

K. S. R. Krishna Raju
18 Marine View, Krishna Nagar,
Visakhapatnam 2

Congratulations on starting a nature-study club, and on the choice of name! You certainly have our blessings.

Back numbers of the Newsletter are available at a nominal charge of 50 paise per copy, and if you will kindly send us some money we will post you a selection to the value of your remittance. Unfortunately all back numbers are not available, and if we cannot supply them we shall return the money.

(An article on birdwatching around Visakhapatnam by Mr Krishna Raju appears on page 1 of this issue.) — Eds.

The Tree Sparrow in Saurashtra

I was most interested to read in Lalsinh M. Raol's article on birdwatching in the Sasan Gir Forest, which was published in the March issue of the Newsletter, that he had seen Tree Sparrows in the Gir Forest.

I wonder whether he is referring to the true Tree Sparrow — Passer montanus — or whether he is using the local name of some other species?

If in fact he saw Passer montanus, then this would appear to be a very interesting record and one which is worthy of a note in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society.

Of the form Passer montanus dilutus, the only one which could possibly be involved, Dillon Ripley in his Synopsis has this to say of its distribution:

> ' Range - West Pakistan in northern Baluchistan, west to Kalat, N. W. F. P., Chitral, Hazara, straggling in winter south to Mekran coast, Chaman and Quetta . . . '

Stuart Baker in the Fauna of British India, Second Edition, says that this form straggles into India along the N.W. Frontier.

Dharmakumarsinhji does not mention the bird in his Birds of Saurashtra nor does Salim Ali mention it in his Birds of Kutch or his ' Birds of Gujarat ' (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. Vol. 52). Finally, it is absent from Barnes's ' Birds of Bombay ' and Butler's ' Birds of Sind, Cutch, Kathiawar, North Gujarat and Mount Aboo '.

Perhaps Mr Rao would care to clarify the position as the sighting is not only interesting, but would seem to be an important one. It is noted, incidentally, that he speaks in the plural and not the singular, so that we are not dealing here with an odd, aberrant wanderer that has strayed a long way out of its range, but with a number of birds of the species.

S. K. Reeves
Bookham, Surrey, England

' Turnstone (Arenaria interpres): Why interpres? '

Further to the letter on this subject which appeared in the March issue of the Newsletter, I thought readers might be interested in a little

further light which can be cast on this subject, although it does no more than confirm what has already been said. What will be of interest to Indian readers, however, is that the name interpres is partly derived from Sanskrit.

Col. A. Le Messurier in his Game, Shore and Water Birds of India gives the following explanation of the derivation of the name of this very attractive bird:

' Arenaria : pertaining to sand, arena.

Interpres : an agent between two parties, an explainer; from inter: between, and the root of the Sanskrit prath: unfold (whence πλατύς : broad); perhaps in allusion to is warning note. '

S. K. Reeves
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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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OBSERVATIONS ON THE ROOSTING AND NESTING HABITS OF THE COPPERSMITH (MEGALAIMA HAEMACEPHALA) *

T. V. Jose

On 10th July, 1965, after an interval of some two months I went again to the Coppersmith bird's nest site, somewhere opposite Tata Fundamental Research Institute, Colaba. The monsoon had set in, the earth was damp and all the vegetation was drenched in rain water. Though the sky was cloudy, the sun peeped through at intervals and brightened the atmosphere. It was 6.15 p. m. and the dark entrance of the nest-holes was rather difficult to see.

In that dreary weather I saw a Coppersmith clinging to a hole in the circular piece of wood that was obliquely attached to the top of the fence pike. The bird was excavating a new cavity obviously for roosting as the breeding season was over. For 3-4 seconds the birds would rest vertically, perching at its mouth. Then it would go inside. From the movement of the tail visible from the outside it appeared as if it was pecking at the wood. When it came out into the open again it would spit out the dust gathered in its beak, and rest awhile.

As I was observing the activities of the bird the watchman came on his usual round. My frantic signalling to him to stop was of no avail. So I shoulted. Before the man showed any response, the bird had flown and sat on the fence wire. The time then was 6.22. It was 6.30 when it resumed its task. The sequence of operations continued. The bird flew away at 6.40 of its own accord.

The new comer appeared to be a fine specimen. It has shining plumes, bright crimson on the throat and forehead, legs coral red. I approached the pike and had a good look. There was a nail-hole just above the entrance. The length of the wood from the hole

*Refer to ' Roosting Habits of the Coppersmith ', Newsletter Vol. 5: 7-8, Nov. 1965, and the ' Story of Kotur the Coppersmith chick ', Vol. 6, Nos. 7 and 8, July and August 1966.

entrance down to the tip of the log was not more than 5 inches.

My standing there alone in the midst of a wild heath roused suspicion in a passing crow and it cawed repeatedly drawing attention of other members of its clan. The watchman was eyeing me suspiciously too. Some jungle crows added to the confusion. The watchman came closer and told me impatiently that I should not stand there to see what a bird might do to raise its young. Finally around 7.00 the bird returned to the incomplete hole for the night.

The inclement weather did not permit me to visit the nest site often. The excavation work of the bird was already over and it regularly roosted in the hole, its neighbour's reaction was one of cordial tolerance. Generally speaking the Coppersmiths are pugnacious birds and I wonder what made them tolerable to the rest.

There were two birds that I had observed last breeding season, roosting in a nearby pike. The parent birds passed the nights with their young in the same nest hole. But once the chicks had been weaned they roosted in separate holes. I cannot say whether this is a general habit or one in particular to these two only. The fact that I have never observed the fledgelings returning to their respective nest-holes, coupled with my experience with the chicks I had reared, causes one to believe that the young roost in trees, till the instinct to peck at dead wood gets stronger. They in turn slowly perfect the art of pecking out holes to roost or nest.

My next visit was on 21st November 1965. There were many unfortunate changes -- the surrounding area outside the fence had been cleared and pits dug in line with the old fence. The watchman confirmed my fear that a new fence was to be erected. He flatly refused to hand over the old hollowed-out wooden pieces to me. I went and explained matter to the boss who allowed me to take what I wanted. But all I could get was the one the new comer was working on.

On Christmas Day, I cut the log in two, longitudinally. I was surprised to notice that the inside of the hole hadnt been besmirched with droppings. The upper portion of the dorsal side had been slightly discoloured and smoothened out by the repeated rub of the bird's feet.

What attracted my attention was the design of the hole itself. The narrowest part of the cavity was the mouth as shown in the diagram. With the exception of a snake no other animal of prey could possibly enter. In the widest part not much space could be left once the bird was inside and yet the bird enters the hole downwards and turns round inside and shows its head out, in a few moments. The small tail can be easily tucked upwards to the level of its rump, thus reducing the length. In the young the tail assumes this position always.

A few days before the 1st September 1966, I tied the two halves of the roosting hole. with thin copper wire hidden in grooves, the tiny chinks were plugged with discoloured wax to make it waterproof. I tied it to the lower side of one of the sloping branches of a banyan tree. The mouth of the hole faced downwards. I placed a thin piece of dry root across the entrance to mark the presence of any bird that might enter the roosting hole. Hardly a week had passed when I found the root missing. In the evening, as I waited to see if any bird would go in,I was surprised to find one peeping out instead. It was raining on the 3rd night so I focussed the beam of the torch on the hole and was rewarded to see the bird's head at the opening. I repeatedly focussed the light at intervals up to 10 p. m. and each time the bird's head would peep out enquiringly. I felt that perhaps water was dripping into the hole and disturbing the occupant. So I repeated the experiment with another bird roosting in a nearby mango tree with the same result. The next day was wet too, though the rain stopped at dusk. Around 8 p. m. I repeated the experiment of focussing the torch-light at the entrance of the hole but no head peeped out. The result was the same at the other hole too. As the darkness grew the torch-light was more prominent. This time the head appeared at the

hole only to recede again when the light was switched off. I went on repeating my performance and with the same result at both holes.

I could not spare much time for birdwatching the following days. The bird was brooding when I went there the next time. On the 23rd December 1966 I witnessed the parent birds bringing food for the young ones. On the 30th I climbed the tree but found no life at the hole. Probably the movements caused by my climbing had frozen the chicks. I noticed, though, that the present occupants had made some surface chisellings on the walls.

A few days later I found that somebody had removed the log altogether;from the people around I learnt that a fledgeling had luckily escaped.

I am unable to state whether this bird and the bird at the M. E. S. Yard are the same as the short distance between the two places was only 300 yards. The possibility of the same bird finding its old roost is small as there were a number of them in that area. Perhaps an old hole is readily acceptable no matter who used it previously.

SIRKEER CUCKOOS (TACCOCUA LESCHENAULTI) AND OTHERS AT KANKESHWAR

Zafar Futehally

Early last month I was in Kihim and I went up Kankeshwar hill particularly with the object of seeing and listening to Shamas (Copsychus malabaricus) which are always present in this lush evergreen forest. I left house at 5.30 in the morning and started climbing the hill in approximately half an hour. It was distressing to see that the lower slopes which were so well protected with vegetation in the past have been completely denuded of trees and shrubs because the karvanda bushes have been hacked down. The merry warble of the Redwhiskered Bulbul (Pycnonotus jocosus) was not heard at all until I was a fair distance on the higher slopes.

However, half way up the hill my attention was suddenly drawn to two large birds gliding near the ground which finally landed in a low shrub. My first impression was that these were very similar to the Redbilled Blue Magpies which are seen under such differenct circumstances in the Himalayas. I looked at them closely through the binoculars and was delighted to have my first good view of the Sirkeer Cuckoos. These birds have long white-tipped graduated tails and red bills so that the reference to the Redbilled Blue Magpie is not entirely unwarranted. In spite of pursuing them as hotly as I could, I got very unsatisfactory subsequent vies, and cannot really write anything more useful about them. Salim Ali says:

' Largely terrestrial. Stalks about amongst thickets like Crow-Pheasant, searching for food: insects, lizards, fallen fruits and berries, etc. Runs swiftly through undergrowth looking like mongoose, but is a feeble flier. Ascends trees rapidly, hopping from branch to branch with great agility.

Call: Occasional. A sharp loud kek-kek-kek-kerek-kerek-kerek of quality of Roseringed Parakeet's shrieks; also reminiscent in a way of the call of Barred Jungle Owlet (Glaucidium radiatum).

Nesting: Non-parasitic. Season -- March to August, varying with locality. Nest -- ashallow saucer of twigs lined with green leaves, in a thorn bush or sapling 5 to 20 ft up. Eggs -- 2 or 3, white, with a chalky texture. '

When I reached the top I saw the Ashoka (Saraca indica) in bloom and this is always a pleasing experience because there are very few places left in India where these trees survive. From the depths of the forest the rolling song of the Shama came through, and after a 20 minutes' search I managed to focus my binoculars on a bird which

was singing with great abandon. I made some notes at the time. My diary says:

' At 8.15 saw a Shama. Its call sounds like: Lets go on and on see saw -- chi chi chi chi. '

After a while I heard the joyous though harsh calls of the Grey Junglefowl: kuk-kaya-kaya-kuk from several directions. My enjoyment was however cut short by the sound of a gun obviously aimed at this bird. During the two hours that I was on the hill I heard three shots and made a feeble attempt to go in the direction of the sound. Knowing how roughly Game Wardens are treated by poachers, I was not unhappy at not being able to apprehend them.

When I came down the hill I went to lodge a complaint against the use of firearms in the Close Season, which starts on 31st March. The Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat (whose name was given to me as Shri Manek Babuji Raut) was not available and so even a formal protest could not be made on this unfortunate situation. I will post this Newsletter to him in the hope that the matter will receive his attention.

The list of birds which I saw that day (5.v.1969) at Kankeshwar if reproduced below:

Blackbellied Finch Larks, Spotted Doves, Whitebrowed Bulbuls, Indian Robin, Jungle Crow, Common Green Bee-eaters, Whitebreasted Kingfisher, Koels, Crow-Pheasant, Redwhiskered Bulbuls, Golden Orioles, Palm Swifts, Redrumped Swallows, Jungle Babblers, Rufous -bellied Babblers (a large flock in Carissa bushes, with white throats, rounded tails, ashy brown above, rufous below, and very active. In some the white throat prominent; in others absent; why?), Redvented Bulbul, Scimitar Babbler (heard but not seen), Spotted Babbler (heard, not seen), Crested Larks, Tailor Bird, Black Drongos, Iora, Blackbirds, Little Brown Doves, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Little Brown Flycatcher, Large Green Barbet, Coppersmith, and Common Myna.

I was completely fooled by a Jerdon's Chloropsis that morning. I though I heard a Black Drongo calling and without looking up on the flowering Erythrina from which the sound came I noted Black Drongo in my list. When I raised my head, I was amused to see a Jerdon's Chloropsis calling like a drongo. These birds are extraordinarily good mimics and even memorise the calls of migrant birds, which they repeat out of season and cause much confusion in the mind of the birdwatcher.

I made some notes of the trees on Kankeshwar also on that day. Mango, teak, Ashok, karanj, jak fruit, Bombax, Erythrina, Ber, Palas -- these were the more prominent. There was one tree which was known locally as Hola. I was told that if you eat too many seeds of the fruit, you feel giddy and may even die. Can any readers throw some light on Hola!

BIRDS OF BARH

Kameshwar Pd. Singh

Barh is a small town situated 40 miles east of Patna on the main line. It is situated on the south bank of the Ganges. The town is important because of the Subdivisional Headquarters. I am living in Barh for last 14 years and watching birds in and around the town and specially in the Ganges.

Among the birds of the garden and orchard the most conspicuous are the green barbets, and coppersmiths. Their loud cootroo-cootroo and tonk-tonk is one of the most common sounds of the locality, though it is difficult to observe these birds in the green foliage. Rufousbellied Nuthatches are also common and they look very pretty creeping up and down the large trunks of the trees. The little minivets are seen sometimes on the tree-tops in their beautiful plumage. Purple Sunbirds are very commonly seen throughout the year, their plumage shining brilliantly in the sun. I think that they live in the non-breeding plumage for a very short time perhaps for less than two months. Common Hornbills were observed twice but they are not resident birds here. Once a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher was also observed but it was never seen again. Rollers and common green parakeets are very common and producing great noise in the summer mornings. Last winter I also observed three Kashmir Rollers which I reported to the Newsletter.

Among the interesting birds of prey a tawny eagle and a short-toed eagle were observed only once. The tawny eagle was seen attacking the nest of yellow wasps perhaps eating their larvae and eggs. Shikras are very common and white-eyed buzzards are frequently observed soaring in winter months. Common Kites are of course found frequently but they are not some common as they are in other towns.

The most striking feature of Barh is the sight of waterbirds in the Ganges specially in winter. Most beautiful sights are the pairs of ruddy sheldrakes sitting on the sandbanks or swimming in the river. They are very wary and once can approach near them only in a boat. The area is heavily shot and the birds are-fully acquain-ted with the sight of a man carrying a gun. Common Teals, Pintails, Garganey are very frequent. They are found intermingled in large flocks of over thousand birds. Small flocks of Barheaded Geese and Grey Lag are also seen. These large birds only frequent those sand-banks and nearby green fields of newly sown rabi crops which are less frequented by man. They are very wary and any one can think himself lucky if he succeeds in shooting one of them in his day's outing.

As for waders the most common are green shanks and red shanks found in small flocks on sandbanks. Sandpipers of various kinds are common and they are found up to April and early May. But the most beautiful of waders, the Avocet is rare. I have seen them only on two occasions and that only in flocks of three or four birds. Among the larger waders, blacktailed godwit and curlews are rarely seen. Common heron are seen as singles or pairs. Large flocks of Demoiselle Crane are common sight in rabi fields by the side of the Ganges. On one occasion a small flock of pelicans was seen flying but they were so high that I was unable to identify them. The brownheaded gulls and river terns are very common and they beautify the Ganges scene with their graceful flights.

These are some interesting birds which are found near this small town. Other common birds of the typical Indian scene are found but I need not describe them as they are too common to be described. Large scale construction work and cutting of trees and orchards are affecting the bird population as in other towns. But I think that birds are adopting to the changing environment and they will remain with us to beautify the scene and cheer us.

SHORT NOTES

Thomas Gay

Crowing about Kody!

Last April, I was fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of our loveliest hill-station. (For the benefit of any fellow B.Ws for whom this is not already identification enough, let me say it was Kodai Kanal in the Palni Hills.) And among Kody's countless atractions must be included the fact that, as every second resident assured me, ' you never get any crows there. '

But is it a fact? True, I never saw a House Crow anywhere, nor any sort of crow on tree, rock, house or ground. But on two separate occasions I saw what I swear was a Jungle Crow flying rapidly over Kody about 1000 feet up. A birdwatcher soon learns to identify birds by peculiarities of flight, and the flight of a Jungle Crow is among the most distinctive.

On both occasions the Crow showed an obvious desire to shake off the mist of Kody as quickly as possible, having, evidently no intention of coming down to land. Here then is evidence that there have been two crows, since the days of Archaeopteryx, who knew where they were not wanted AND respected their ill-wishers' feelings.

Anybody want to challenge or confirm my refutation of Kody's No-Crow legend?

A Bicycle built for two?

Robins have won a name for originality -- eccentricity, even -- in the selection of nesting sites, but last year a pair of Indian Robins, here in Poona, established what looks to me like a record.

The site they selected was the small gap between the petrol tank and the pillion seat of my daughter's Vespa scooter. Since the machine had to carry Vijaya to college twice a day, the construction work never got very far; but what it lack in achievement it made up in persistence. On setting out, my daughter had to brush away the untidy mess of twigs, dead grass, etc.; but within a few minutes of her return, the birds would be back at their task.

I made a wooden nesting-box for them, which I placed a few feet away from the scooter, right beside the scooter, and finally on the seat itself. I carefully transferred their building materials to the nesting-box, which was left as close as possible to the parking place whenever the scooter went out. But my efforts were treated with disdain. The Robins wanted the gap under the pillion seat, and the gap under the pillion seat was what they intended to have.

Alas! I was not rich enough to buy another scooter for Vijaya and leave her own machine for the Robins. And so, after many days the birds had to admit defeat, leaving us to a hollow victory bereft of all the proverbial sweets.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Pied Crested Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus)

The Pied Crested Cuckoo will make its appearance in Bombay and other places where it has been absent for the last several months in late May or early June.

Readers will recall the several articles on this subject in our Newsletter and it would be interesting to have a record from the whole country about the first sighting of this bird during this season.

Because of its rather loud and persistent call pi-iu, pi-iu it cannot be easily missed. It is also of course given undue

attention by crows which harass it (often to death) immediately it arrives.

Will readers therefore keep their ears and eyes open and report on this bird to the Newsletter. The monsoon has apparently commenced strongly in south India, and the birds are expected to act as advance gaurds and proceed northwards with the rains.

Cruelty to Birds

A note from the Observer of the United Kingdom, of 23 February 1969 entitled " 'Cruelty' by US bird men ", by Laurence Marks is reproduced below:

' A strongly worded complaint about the brutality of American ornithologists while conducting research in Cyprus has been sent to the secretary of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington by the British Trust for Ornithology, the principal British body concerned with bird-ringing.

This complaint is quite unrelated to recent American criticisms of the Smithsonian for accepting money from Fort Detrick (the United States Defence Department's centre for germ warfare research) for ornithological expeditions overseas. This time the complaint concerns cruelty to animals.

In August 1967 a team of ornithologists from the Smithsonian who had been in Egypt arrived in Cyprus to study migration patterns and to take blood samples for research into bird-borne virus diseases.

The catching and ringing of birds are governed by strict rules laid down by the British Trust for Ornithology with the object of preventing cruelty to the birds. British expeditions normally trap birds with ' mist nets ' of fine black nylon, and then quickly remove the birds. ' Liming ' -- catching them by coating trees and other perches with an adhesive substance -- is forbidden. Where blood samples are taken, the number of birds destroyed is carefully kept to a minimum.

The Americans agreed to abide by the Trust's rules and to accept supervision by members of the Cyprus Ornithological Society. What happened is recorded in a letter to the Trust last November by Corporal Peter Stewart, British secretary of the society.

During the autumn, in their effort to trap as many birds as possible, a large number of nets were used and left in situ throughout the migration period August to November, ' he writes. ' As a result, many birds were lost to predators, especially cats, and through too long exposure in the nets. Supervision of the nets was quite inadquate. One man was left on many occasions to deal with more than 20 nets spread over an area of four acres, the majority of them hidden by undergrowth. '

Corporal Stewart alleges that the Americans bought from local people many birds which had been caught by ' liming. '

He continues: ' During my frequent visits to the village, I made the following observations: 'Sunday, 31 March. My wife and I visited the Ekekelia Military Hospital and in the pathological laboratory witnessed the bleeding to death of many birds, with 10 or more being used for one blood sample. In some cases, the sample was discarded due to misidentification of species (e. g. Whitethroats mixed with Lesser Whitethroats).

' There were many bird species in holding cages, waiting to be processed. These had been caught throughout the previous day and brought to the hospital in bulk, and have (sic) been held in captivity a minimum of 12 hours. Some had broken limbs, many had lost feathers, and others almost dead from their long and crowded confinement.

' We then visited their HQ at Paralimni . . . There were many birds in holding cages. Those unsuitable for specimens and unable to fly were killed and thrown into a waste pit in

in the surrounding garden. Other fitter specimens were simply released, many of them to fall foul of lime sticks which had been put up in their own backyard.

' My wife and I found several injured birds in the garden, which I immediately killed, and a pair of cats feasted well on others. We were continually removing birds from the lime sticks, but they returned to the trees and were caught again, ending up unfit for flight.... The caged specimens included shrikes which had their lower jaws broken by the catchers to avoid being bitten. '

The handling of birds has to be most carefully done to avoid causing them unnecessary pain. Dr Salim Ali has been very particular about the manner in which birds are handled during the course of bird ringing camps organized by the Bombay Natural History Society. Sometimes when small birds get unmeshed in the net it is extremely difficult to disentangle them. A. Schifferli of the Swiss Ornithological Station at Sempach who first came down to India in 1959 to initiate the BNHS team into bird netting and ringing was a wizard with his fingers, and on several occasions I had to seek his assistance for removing a bird from the nets. On one occasion in Kutch I had a long battle with a Rosy Pastor which had got frightened by an approaching jackal who was heading for the bird helpless in the net, when were having our afternoon siesta. The Rosy Pastors have strong beaks and use them effectively.

Whatever may be the truth about the Americans operating in Cyprus there is no doubt that teams from the Smithsonian in Washington and from the Migratory Animals Pathological Survey of the US Army who have been cooperating with the BNHS work on the most scientific and civilized lines and see to it that the birds are not distressed in the least during these operations.

CORRESPONDENCE

Blackbird in Bombay

This is with reference to the article of Mr S. V. Nilakanta in the No. 4, Vol. 9, April, 1969 issue of the Newsletter in which he guessed to have seen recently in Bombay a subspecies of European Blackbird (Turdus merula). I would suggest that he saw one of the subspecies of Nilgiri Blackbird (Turdus simillimus) and quote the following description of T. s. mahrattensis from p. 65 of the ' Indian Hill Birds ' by Dr Salim Ali (1949 edition):

' A sober grey-brown bird with a black cap and yellow eyelids, legs and bill. The female is more ashy above and paler generally, with the cap brown. '

Dr G. De
Prof. in Electrical Eng.
Indian Inst. of Tech.
Bombay

' Birdwatching in Sasan Gir Forest '

As mentioned in my article on ' Birdwatching in Sasan Gir Forest ' in the March issue of the Newsletter, the Brown Flycatcher was actually seen in May 1966 and not in March 1966. I searched my records to find out the typed copy of my note sent to the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society to ascertain as to how this error crept in, but I could not succeed in finding it out. In my manuscript copy as well as in my diary the date is 3rd May 1966. Thank you very much for drawing my attention to the inaccuracy seen in my notes.

During birdwatching excursions at Rajkot we used to refer to Yellowthroated sparrows (Petronia xanthocollis) as Tree Sparrows The species seen in the Gir Forest and inadvertently mentioned as Tree Sparrow by me was actually Yellowthroated Sparrows. I am thankful to Mr S. K. Reeves for his query in the April issue of the Newsletter.

Jalsinh M. Raol
Porbandar

Identity of a flycatcher

Mr Ravi at page 10 of Newsletter Vol. 9, No. 3, March 1969 reported a flycatcher (fantail). I observed similar flycatchers in the mango groves of Powai in a week around 23.11.1968 having the following features:

length: 6 inches
head, throat and nape blue
possibly a bit of crest -- dark blue or black
Upper plumage, smoky black
breast, abdomen and vent white
square tail, sometimes fanned out by 30°

Could you kindly tell me the name of this bird?

Dr G. C. De
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AN EARLY MORNING IN MAY IN A POONA GARDEN

Dr Miss A. M. Mani

There are moments when the air is still, the whole world seems asleep, even the air. It is early morning. There comes the sound of a coppersmith hammering in the distance. A cock crows next door. A redvented bulbul chirrups somewhere. A solitary house swift suddenly appears in the sky and disappears. A little brown dove takes a chakkar past the mango tree in front of me and alights on the cassia next door.

The jungle crow that lives on top of the large banyan tree at the end of the garden appears from nowhere and lands apparently right on his nest. The nest looks very fragile and ragged. I wonder how it can support its weight.

Another black crow wings his way across the sky to the Fergusson College hills. A swarm of sparrows crosses the sky and disappears in the distance. This is followed by another swarm and a solitary jungle crow. No birds still in the garden, except the jungle crow sitting in his nest. This is surprising, since the garden is normally full of their song and sound and the flutter of their wings. Perhaps they guess today I am writing about them? Instead of merely enjoying watching them and listening to them?

More house swifts in the sky, flashing their white rumps. Sometimes in the evenings nearly a hundred of them ' ball up in the air in play ', the thinness of their cries being made up in volume by sheer numbers. A little brown dove is rummaging in the rubbish dump next door. It is 6 a. m. A common green bee-eater flies past with a

flash of brown. Another swarm of birds; House Sparrows? Bulbuls?

How the male koel begins his cacophony. Normally he starts at about 4 in the morning in the mango tree near my bedroom. He is late today. Today he is in the banyan tree across the road. The sky in the east changes colour from orange, silver grey and lilac to white. The clouds change from dark grey to white and finally to salmon pink, as the sun rises above the horizon. The air is fresh and cool and a gentle breeze blows.

Not a bird in my garden still. Another swarm of birds in the distance; weaver birds? sparrows? mynas? They all seem to fly north. There is a banyan tree to the north where hundreds and thousands of mynas and sparrows congregate in summer. The noises they make in the mornings and evenings can be heard over miles. There is another favourite, another banyan tree, in the garden next door, which attracts hundreds of mynas, bulbuls and sparrows when the berries are ripe and red, but it is mainly a transit camp or feeding centre. I suddenly realize the swarms come from a leafy tree further south. Hundreds of birds roost here for the night, with much noise and flying around before retiring for the night. In the morning they take off in waves, like endless swarms of winged termites on their nuptial flight.

At long last a male Indian robin alights on my hedge and then jumps down on to the road. I see him and his ashy brown hen every morning when I go for a walk. Also countless common and Brahminy mynas on the road in the early morning. A Brahminy myna, looking elegant with his black tuft and sleek head lands on the banyan tree and when the early morning sun shines on him he glows; the sun turns his brown to gold.

I look up and notice two crows in the nest. The nest is so small that I wonder it could ever contain them and the eggs. But the constant presence and activity of the two birds indicates eggs? little ones?

A redvented bulbul lands on the hedge and flies away the moment I look. A lovely crimson-throated barbet lands on the top branch of the banyan tree and sits preening himself. He looks beautiful, a gorgeous red and green in the bright sun. One has a nest in a hole in the glyricedia in front. There are usually about half a dozen of them in the garden. No roseringed parakeets today. Yesterday two chased each other continuously across the garden. A common myna passes by, followed by two more. Normally the garden reverberates with their sound.

The crow has come to its nest again and disappeared into it. The time is 6.30 a. m. Surely it cannot contain any little ones?

Two blue rock pigeons fly past. All is peace and quiet. Five more pigeons, grey and brown, fly overhead; a late bat going home. Outside the garden on the telephone wires small bee-eaters huddle together, seven in a span of a few inches when the whole world is open to them.

No sunbirds today, though purple and purple-rumped sunbirds normally frequent the garden. There was one yesterday, black and yellow, very slim and elegant. No white-throated munias or white-eyes nor the hoopoe either. It is too late of course for the grey wagtail that every year comes to my garden on almost exactly the same date. A pigeon flies gracefully past. The sun shines white on the underside of his swept-back wings; he is more elegant than most widely advertised supersonic silver jet. A single house swift in the sky, fluttering around.

All is quiet again. I look carefully, no birds anywhere. Something must be wrong. Two common mynas alight on the tree next door. Two koels, one black, one spotted, sit silently on the bare branches of a cassia next door. The female flies away followed soon by the male. No crow-pheasants today. A pair lives in the garden, flying among the lower branches, hopping on the ground, filling the air with its resonant doom doom, being chased by my dog. In spite of its seemingly unwieldy body and tail it is graceful.

The Indian robin is back again skimming daintily along the ground and flies away. There are generally no babblers or drongos in my garden. The University Gardens at Ganeshkhind swarm with them. In the evenings they crowd into the hundred of haemotoxilon lining the roads and fill the air with their screeching. There are also red-wattled lapwings, grey hornbills, white spotted fantail flycatchers, white breasted kingfishers, and Tickell's blue flycatchers in the Park, which I rarely see in my garden. The park in the old Government House at Ganeshkhind is very beautiful. Laid out by Mr Little of Kew Gardens over 60 years ago, it is as old as the Agricultural College Park. These are two of the few oases left in Poona, where predatory animals and human beings seem bent upon destroying everything lovely and turn it into a wilderness. In the park in spite of the thinness of the topsoil, there are peepul and banyan trees, Millingtonia, jacaranda and gulmohr, neem and tamarind trees. The double row of mahogany and tamarind avenues and the avenue of rain trees in the Agricultural College are, to me, unequalled anywhere in the world. Most of the trees have, however, suffered from the Panshet dam disaster. The subsoild water level is so low, I am told, that they die one by one.

It is nearly seven. I dislike the crow that tenants my banyan tree, because apart from looking ugly and making ugly sounds, he drives away all the birds from my garden. And he ate a little baby sparrow which I tried to save last month. The little one had been cruelly pecked at by his fellows and had most of the feathers on his head and back pulled out. It looked so broken and dead that I never expected it to live. As I sat where I am now, with the bird in my hand, it suddenly climbed on to my finger, balanced itself and flew off with a powerful stroke of its wings into the mango tree in front, before I realised what was happening. I was happy it could fly. But within moments the air was full of birds, mynas, bulbuls, crows and even a grey shrike, which I rarely see in my garden. My crow was the quickest; he swooped down and up again with the little bird in its claws, landed on the garage roof a hundred yards away and tearing it to pieces alive, ate it, as I watched helplessly. Is all life cruel?

Now the crow is chasing a myna away. I hear the bulbuls warble and trill — sweet as bells. A myna lands on the water pipe above my head. No sign of pariah kites today. Two have a nest on the top of the banyan tree in the house next door. More pigeons; my two crows came flying across the sky.

I was wrong about my crows. The father, I guess, has just arrived and landed on the nest. The other, the mother, I guess, moves away and through my binoculars I see two ugly scarlet red mouths, wide open, balanced on bare scrawny necks moving up and down and around. Babies! He feeds them, even his wife gets a share; then he flies away. And I was not aware of the babies till today. So my murderer is the most dutiful and gentlest of parents.

Three house sparrows land on the lantana below me; three bulbuls on the custard apple treenext to it. A common iora appears in the mango tree, hopping from branch to branch. No one can match the quality of its musical whistles. No grey tits today; two live in a small tree on the other side of the road. No tailor birds or ashy wren warblers either, though they live in the garden and daily fill the air with song. Both are favourites of mine, because though they are tiny, they have all the plebian virtues of humour, vitality and courage. A magpie robin has just landed next door; another favourite. The ashy wren warbler normally flutters from one branch to another in the hedge and rarely comes up to the level where I now am, on the landing of the spiral staircase at the back of my house.

There is a plumbeous redstart in the garden next door, a lovely russet brown, never still. A redbreasted flycatcher. I once saw a pair of dainty small minivets in the wild fig tree in front

of the house. The mango tree in front of the garage is full of green mangoes. Not a bird, though, in it. It is the bare cassia tree with open pods next door that is the favourite of all the birds. Soon the mango tree will be full of golden orioles.

It is 7 a. m. the police band strikes up martial music. The tailor bird has come. The crow comes and alights on a lower branch. The large red mouths open again like clockwork. Only one? The mother flies away before the father comes up to the nest. The father feeds them. He chases away a myna.

Two stately herons (?) lumber past like old Liberator bombers. I saw seven of them flying in formation yesterday evening. High above, two white-backed vultures circle the sky soaring, gliding -- truly majestic. Lower down there are three pariah kites gliding too, but far from being impressive.

Is it the crow that chases away birds? Or territorial integrity? Or the dog at my feet? Then I realise why I see so few birds in the garden from where I sit, while I see all my friends in the brief ten minutes it takes me to walk down the road. I remember the same thing happened in the forests in Kerala where I once spent a month watching birds. For seemingly hours, the forest is still and nothing stirs. Then the birds come in droves, and the air is full of sound and movement. It is like an invasion, but is soon followed by silence. It happens here too. Nothing is static, nothing is still for long.

MOTIVELESS MALIGNITY OR PURPOSELESS PESTERING

K. K. Neelakantan

Dharmadam Island, on the West Coast, just north of Tellicherry, had a large population of migrant birds this winter. The number of species present wasnt very large, but birds like the Greyheaded Myna and the Indian Oriole made up for this by their strength and constant activity. There were also many Ashy Drongos, Greenish (?) Leaf Warblers and Brown Flycatchers about. Bluetailed Bee-eaters and gulls used to fly over fairly regularly and at times in large numbers. On the beaches were large flocks of Lesser Sandplover with a sprinking of interesting sandpipers and a few Whimbrel.

In this note I wish to record a rather curious hostility that the Brown Flycatcher (Muscicapa latirostris) developed towards the Indian Oriole by the middle of March. Till then Indian Orioles and Brown Flycatchers used to tolerate or ignore each other. But all on a sudden I began to notice a regular attempt on the part of flycatcher to chase every flying oriole. Almost in the spirit of a true sportsman, the flycatcher normally never ' aimed at ' a sitting oriole. But the moment an oriole left its perch, the flycatcher would give chase.

Similarly the Ashy Drongo, too, towards the close of its stay with us began suddenly harrying every passing Jungle Crow. This, to some extent, one could understand. Though the Ashy Drongo does not breed here, the imminence of the breeding season perhaps rouses a hostile response to the sight of a crow. But why should the flycatcher turn upon the oriole? Even if the Brown Flycatcher and the Indian Oriole share the same breeding grounds (I dont know whether they dos so), the oriole can not be a danger to the flycatcher. Is there perhaps some serious competition for food between these two species during the breeding season? Does the nesting Brown Flycatcher exclude from its territory other insectivorous birds totally unrelated to it? Is there any known instance of such territorial aggression (intra-specific) among birds with the same food-preferences? Could the tendency of the Brown Flycatcher to harry the oriole be a manifestation of the general restlessness many migrants develop on the eve of their departure?

BURIED ALIVE

T. Koneri Rao

On 19.4.1969 (at Polur, N. A. Dt, Tamil Nadu) a Pipit was building its nest in a ploughed field. The nest composed of coarse grass and feathers, was placed underneath a huge clod of earth. This block of clay was at an inclination to the nest and it would well serve the purpose of shielding the nest from the sun, rain and marauding birds. On 1.5.1969 the pipit was brooding and when it saw me it flew off, exposing a blind young bird and one unhatched egg. As I had selected this nest for my photography, I felt happy over the successfull hatching of one egg and I thought it would be better to wait for the other young bird to come out. Unfortunately, in the small hours of 3.5.1969 it rained heavily. At 6.45 a. m. I was on the field hoping to see the pipits feeding the young birds. When I stood at a distance there was no trace of pipit and its familiar calls, Cheechit...chechit...cheechit, were not heard. I approached slowly and stood right in the middle of the field and found the earth was disturbed due to a heavy downpour and the field was almost flat. The previous day I was worrying myself about the probable aperture and the shutter to be used. When silence continued to brood over the field, my fear grew. I strained my eyes over the field but the nest was not visible. I thought it was washed away in the torrent. Luckily with the help of a landmark I went to the exact spot where the nest was and started pulling out the wet sticky mass of earth to investigate. Slowly the earth departed leaving a slit through which I saw, to my astonishment, a parent pipit. When I pulled out the earth further, the pipit eased itself, chirped and flew off. The space of the nest was found to be halved. One young bird started crawling and the other one was lying dead, probably due to suffocation. The huge mass of clay getting heavier and loose due to rain, had fallen over the nest enveloping it completely. This I believe, must have occurred around 3 a.m. For more than 3 hours the parent and the babies must have suffered from suffocation and hunger, well buried below the earth with no possibility of escape. I threw away the dead chick and repaired the nest. After some half an hour's gap I revisited the spot to find the young bird in the nest missing. The parents never returned to the nest, perhaps startled by the early morning disaster. I returned home dejected over the incident but I had the satisfaction of at least having saved an adult pipit.

COURAGE, PERSEVERANCE AND UNITY IN NATURE

Nirmalkumar of Jasdan

About three months ago from the verandah of my den at Mt Abu I saw an interesting scene. I saw a Jungle Crow bringing in his beak a badly mauled, half devoured little chick.

Within minutes the parent birds of the murdered chick tried to attack the predator by frantic ' harakiri ' swoops and cries for help. In just a few seconds a pair of Paradise Flycatchers, yellow-cheeked tits, drongos and a number of other imps were assembled there and assisting the Mynas, whose chick the crow had killed. It was quite a problem for the Jungle Crow to retain his perch on the branch and eventually he had to let go the remains of the chick in order to safeguard his own precious life.

All the birds of the neighbourhood were immediately pleased and, so was I, the onlooker.

THE MATING OF THE GOLDENBACK WOODPECKER (Dinopium benghalense)

K. K. Neelakantan

The Goldenbacked Woodpecker is well known for its territorial display. Not only do both birds of a pair indulge in drumming, but they take an almost equal share in driving others of the species out of their territory. In their antagonistic display, these birds raise their scarlet crests and spread out their strikingly patterned wings. One would expect birds so richly endowed with colour, crest and ' song ' to exploit these just before coitus. I was surprised, therefore, to note recently a pair mating with hardly any display.

At 3.25 p. m. on 30.3.1969 I was watching a goldenbacked woodpecker pecking at a green jack fruit, wondering what it could find to eat on the rough rind. This bird's mate was then busy seeking food on a thick vertical branch close by. The bird which had been pecking at the jack fruit suddenly jumped down and sat across a branch. The other at once flew down to the same branch and hopped nearer to its mate. The first bird then turned about, and, still perching across the branch, crouched. It held its body almost horizontally. The other straightaway hopped closer, stepped on to its mate's back and trod her. The male seemed to have only a precarious hold; he was about to slip off twice. Without even climbing down to the branch, the male flew off. Soon the female also took off in the same direction.

Neither before nor after the act did either bird make any sound. The only ' display ' consisted of the female's assuming a rather unusual posture in invitation to the male.

ARRIVAL OF THE INDIAN PITTA IN BOMBAY, AND OTHER BIRD NOTES

D. A. Stairmand

On the morning of 18th May, about one mile from Kanheri Caves, I saw and Indian Pitta (Pitta brachyura) fly up onto a branch of a tree as I was walking along. The pittahad been on the ground in an area covered with fallen leaves and interspersed with some stones. The area was completely shaded by large leafy trees. While the bird was on the branch of the tree I could see only its top half, the lower half being obscured from view by leaves. I retired to a distance of some 50 yards and the Pitta came down from the tree and hopped around amongst the fallen leaves giving me a perfect view. The bird was silent throughout.

You may be interested to know that also in the Kanheri Caves area I saw on the 18th morning a Whitethroated Ground Thrush (Zoothera citrina) and an Emerald Dove (Chalcophaps indica).

I read in one of your own articles in this Newsletter that the Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum) is supposed not to occur in Bombay. On 17th May 1969 I saw one at Vihar Lake. I followed the bird in flight onto a branch of a tree where it sat for about 3 minutes. There was a good breeze blowing and as the Brahminy Myna had its back to the breeze its bushy crest was being blown around a lot.

Lastly, I saw from my Flat, three Reef Herons (Egretta gularis) returning to the trees near Breach Candy Swimming Bath at 7 p. m. on the 17th. Two were of the slaty phase and one white. From October 1968 to the beginning of February 1969, about 24 Reef Herons (18 slaty, 6 white) roosted in these trees and I watched their goings and comings most mornings and evenings. Several birds of both phases acquired nuchal crests and filamentous plumes on back and brest as early as 27th January. Since then the numbers have dwindled and I think the number has been down to 2 slaty and 1 white for approximately one month. These appear to be here later than records indicate.

On the 18th at 7.10 p. m. I saw the three Reef Herons flying back to the trees where they roost. They usually stand a few minutes on the outer branches before disappearing into the foliage.

BIRDS SEEN IN OUR GARDEN IN DISERGARH -- February and March 1969

Mrs Sarah Jameson

1. Feb. 15th. A small bird about the size of the Redbreasted Flycatcher which is a winter resident in our garden. Flying jerkily after insects. Dark greyish brown on top, paler below. Palish eyebrow and one wing bar. Legs, bill and eyes dark. Breast mottled with dark and pale grey. No sound heard. Dark line through eye.

2. Seen last winter 3 or 4 times but only once this year, on Feb. 16th. About bulbul size but slimmer. Darkish brown head, wings and upperparts. Dark eyes, bill and legs. Underparts buff, finely barred across neck, breast and abdomen. The most outstanding feature was three dark broad stripes. One running from bill, over crown nape and back to base of tail, and the other two spripes running from the eyes back over the length of the folded wings. No sound heard.

3. Feb. 12th and three times later. Also seen last winter. About bulbul size. Brown, with a bluish slaty tinge. Slightly paler on breast, paler still -- more or less buff -- undertail, rump and throat. Bill and legs dark fleshy seen against afternoon sun. Bill fairly long and straight. Seen from the side, just below the bill the feathers stood out rather untidily. Eyes dark, with a palish undefined eyebrown. Dark moustachial streaks on either side of the throat. Seen in silhouette, the tips of its folded wings showed slightly above the line of the back. When seen again, it was turning up dried leaves like a babbler. When sitting on a branch, it is very still. I heard it twice utter a faint Tseep, very like a Tree Pipit's cal.

4. During the hottest hours of the day, a heron-like bird walked about in the grass at the bottom of the garden, almost daily during March. The ground had long since dried up, and there is no standing water there. It does not fit any description! Several times I saw it close enough to see that the eyes and bill were yellow, that it had no black on it anywhere, or any crest or breast plumes. The legs were mottled black. The bird was pale grey all over, NOT white, and the back was much darker grey.

5. March 15th. Seen quite clearly, sitting in a shrub. About small dove size with longish rounded tail. Eyes red. Bill greyish and pointed. Neck, head and throat grey, down to a line across the middle of the breast. Below this line to vent, was pale russet. Upperparts and wings dark grey. Tail graduated, and fanned out when landing. Outer tail feathers had white stripes at right angle to the tail. Primaries had white stripes on the undersides. Never seen here before. Uttered no sound.

6. March 20th. For the first time here, saw a Blackheaded Cuckoo-Shrike. It was chasing a female in and out of the trees frequently calling. According to Whistler the breeding season starts in June but this seemed to indicate it had already started. Could this be so? I noticed that the female's underparts were quite definitely grey, and note white.

7. On March 27th and 28th, round about 9 p. m., we heard the Whitebreasted Water Hen calling near a drain at the side of the garden. The call was the same as in the breeding season, though this is not supposed to start till June. Do they ever make this extraordnary call at any other time?

It is extremely difficult to identify birds from the descriptions of another person. Dr Salim Ali suggests that bird No. 1 is possibly the Dark Grey Bushchat. No. 5, the Plaintive Cucko, Burmese or the

Eastern race. About No. 7, the Whitebreasted Water Hen calling, he says that he has often heard the kook-kook call but not heard the roars and grunts in non-breeding season.

For suggesting identity of puzzling birds, the following particulars are desirable.

1. Type of country where seen (plain or hill, forest, cultivation, near water (pond, river, jheel)
2. Whether on tree or on ground (on cliff, stump, leafy branch, etc.
3. What was it doing (feeding, singing, etc.)
4. Size (long-tailed, short-tailed, long-legged, short-legged, etc. and any striking feature -- bill etc.)
5. Of what familir bird, if any, did it remind you?
6. Overall coloration? Any striking pattern (bars, spots, etc.) on wings, tail or elsewhere?
7. Calls? Reminiscent of any familiar sound? -- Ed./

PAKISTAN: PROTECTING THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

From the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources Bulletin, New Series Vol. 2, No. 10, January/March 1969

In Volume 2 of the Red Data Book, the Great Indian Bustard, Choriotis nigriceps, is listed as very rare and decreasing in numbers, its survival giving cause for considerable anxiety.

Certain efforts have been made to preserve this species in India, as reported in INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR BIRD PRESERVATION Bulletin No. 9, pp. 86-87, but until now these proposals do not appear to have been implemented.

The bustard does not seem to have bred in West Pakistan within living memory. Although it was plentiful in Sind at the turn of the century it has been a rare and irregular summer visitor to the desert areas on the Indian/West Pakistan border. In the summer of 1967, in the Bahawalnagar area of Cholistan, seven were sighted by officials of the Pakistan Forestry Department but, regrettably, two of the birds were shot by local hunters. Fortunately, the recently appointed Chief Conservator of Forests responsible for the Cholistan area is an ardent conservationist and has taken vigorous measures to curb poaching in the border areas. In late March 1968, several Great Indian Bustards were observed near the Indian frontier close to Bahawalnagar town and by the middle of the following month seventeen were counted in this locality. A Forest Ranger was given special responsibility for keeping watch on the area and warning hunters that these were protected birds. It is therefore gratifying to be able to record that up to the end of August all seventeen bustards were still in the vicinity -- although there was no evidence of breeding. In view of the constructive action taken by the Pakistan authorities, it is confidently expected that next March will again see an influx of these birds into Pakistan territory; and it is hoped that they may feel sufficiently secure to breed.

RANDOM NOTES

Zafar Futehally

In the May issue of the Newsletter we made an appeal to readers to keep their ears and eyes open for the arrival of the Pied Crested Cuckoo. I was in Neyveli, a 125 miles south of Madras on the 16th of this month and saw the first bird of the season. Of course in the south there is a resident race, and it was unfair of me to have gone to the bird without waiting for the migrants to come to me.

However, Mrs Jamal Ara has just written to say that on the 18th she saw a Pied Crested Cuckoo at 7 a. m. in the morning at Ranchi.

At Neyveli I saw several Whitehëaded Babblers (Turdoides affinis) with very white heads. The same species in Madras have much paler heads and I have a feeling that as we drove south the heads grew whiter and whiter. The other birds in the huge establishment of Neyveli Lignite Corporation were Redvented Bulbuls, Black Drongos, Whitebreasted Kingfishers, Coppersmiths, Jungle Crows, Common Green Bee-eaters.

In the delightful garden of Stewart Melluish in Madras we saw a Goldenbacked Woodpecker, the Plaintive Cucko, the Whitebrowed Bulbul, the Common Iora, Whiteheaded Babblers, and Blyth's Reed Warblers

At Kihim on the 18th of May I had a glorious view of the Indian Pitta (Pitta brachyura) hopping on the ground turning over the leaf litter and just a few minutes ago in my garden at Andheri (7 p. m., 21 May) I saw the same species hopping unconcernedly on our lawn. This is the first time that I have seen a pitta here.

A most welcome visitor to the garden along with the pitta was the Whitebrowed Bulbul (Pycnonotus luteolus). This bird has not been seen here for about the last four years. I had given up all hope of its return in view of the fact that the lantana scrub jungle outside our garden where it was usually seen has been destroyed and substituted by multi-storeyed buildings. I was delighted to hear its warbling call in the garden a few minutes after I had seen the pitta, and it is just possible that it has decided to breed in our garden. I will keep you informed about developments.

CORRESPONDENCE

Birds and Salt

In Newsletter Vol. 8, No. 11 of November 1968, Mr T. V. Jose in reporting on a sighting of an Oyster Catcher near Bombay remarks on the drop of moisture seen at the end of the bird's bill. In The Field of 4 July 1968 there is an article by Stanley Cerely on the toxicity of salt to birds and in excess quantities it is absolutely lethat according to the size of the bird. Birds can only tolerate a very small quantity and cannot eliminate it from their systems; but in waders and sea birds which naturally take in a large amount of salt they are able to eliminate the excess quantity by means of a gland sited at the base of the bill, from which a duct leads to the tip of the bill whence the salt appears in the form of a drop of moisture which the bird is seen to shake off at intervals — it is not known if it is irritant thus causing the head shaking. This is what your correspondent saw. I had myself seen it on numerous occasions and wondered about it until it was enlightened by this article.

A. E. Butler
Galwala Road, Ceylon

Pinkheaded Duck on Chhora Beel, West Bengal

A letter received from my husband today contains a bombshell of which he is quite unaware! He casually mentions having seen a Pinkheaded Duck on Chhora Beel in Galsi Police Station area of Burdwan district, West Bengal, in 1939.

Salim Ali, in The Book of Indian Birds revised 1964, writes:

'Distribution. The swampy jungles of the Himalayan terai and duars from Nepal to Assam; Manipur, E. Pakistan; Burma (?). Obtained as far south as Nellore (Andhra) and Jalna (Maharashtra). Last authentic record from Darbhanga district, Bihar, June 1935. Apparently never common or abundant, but was occasionally seen amongst sportsmen's bags of wildfowl. Reduction in numbers noticed as early as 1878, although until about 1890 a half dozen or so still turned up in Calcutta bird market every season. Since 1956 its killing or capture is totally banned by law, but possibly the bird is already extinct.'

Mrs Sarah Jameson

/There had been many mistakes between the Pinkheaded Duck (Rhodonessa caryophyllacea) and the Redcrested Pochard (Netta rufina). It would be worthwhile getting further details of this observation since the writer of the note is reputed to be a careful and knowledgable observer. No aspersions are cast, but one cannot be too careful in these matters. -- Ed./

A suggestion regarding the size of the Newsletter

One suggestion I have is, that instead of printing the Newsletter on a foolscap size paper, a letter size paper can be far more convenient to handle to bind later. The articles are interesting and are worth preserving.

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NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOLUME IX - NO. 7 - JULY,'69.

It is regretted that the Printers, true to their genus have failed to deliver the cover in spite of repeated promises. We do not intend to wait for them any longer.

- ZAFAR FUTEHALLY -
Editor.

N E W S L E T T E R F O R

B I R D W A T C H E R S

Volume 9, Number 7 July 1969

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SOME INDIAN FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES IN TUNISIA

Sydney K. Reeves

My wife and I have just returned from a fortnight's holiday in Tunisia, and I thought that readers of the Newsletter may be interested to hear of some of the birds which we saw and which can also be seen in India. Many of the birds of which I write, I have had the great pleasure of seeing in India -- hence the title of this article. It may be of interest to add that a very high percentage of the total number of birds seen can also be seen in India.

We took our holiday during the last two weeks of April, so that we should be able to see the spring migrants as they moved up to the North African coast from the body of Africa, preparatory to flying across the Mediterranean to Europe, the British Isles and the far North. In this we somewhat miscalculated. We failed to realise that the birds would not be concentrated at particular spots, but would be advancing on an enormously broad front, in fact along the whole extent of the North African coast. In consequence, although we saw quite a variety of birds, including a very generous leavening of rarities, the actual numbers seen were comparatively small. If one wishes to see a large number of birds of many different species, it is obviously best to be on the ' receiving end ' as it were, at a point which causes the birds to become concentrated, such as a headland, towards which birds tired after a long sea crossing will make, or a sheet of water or a marsh or isolated clumps of bushes or trees which eitherprovide cover and shelter or good feeding. Furthermore, one is likely to see more birds during the autumn than the spring migration. The former is far more leisurely, the birds tend to remain feeding and resting for longer periods at their stopping places en route. Another contributory factor is that, in addition to the old birds which have bred, there are the young which they

have produced during the past breeding season which augment the numbers. The spring migration is a very hurried one. The urge to reach the northerly breeding stations, to establish territories, pair and commence breeding seems to be an impelling one. The birds only stay just as long as it is necessary to rest, preen and feed and then move on. We particularly noticed this. Time and again birds seen one day had gone the next. We often noticed also that the birds appeared nervous, and frequently when disturbed they would fly right away as though we had caused them to press on with their migratory journey. The numbers of birds on spring passage also tends to be smaller because many will have perished during the previous autumn migration and during their stay in their winter quarters.

We stayed at a small seaside town called Hammamet at the northern end of the Golfe de Hammamet in the northeastern corner of Tunisia. Hammamet is a small, but very old Arab town, complete with Medina, Rabat and Mosque, and set in ahighly cultivated area. The predominant crops being oranges, lemons, olives and vines. Incidentally, the abundance of Eucalyptus or Blue Gum trees were a happy reminder of the Nilgiris, where the species also grows plentifully. Other plants which aroused nostalgic memories were bougainvillea, which seemed to thrive and added a glorious splash of purple to the brilliantly white buildings; oleanders and hibiscus which grew in the grounds of our hotel, but of which only the latter was in bloom; lantana which we occasionally came across; and cactus which grew in profusion and was just fruiting and which was used for hedges and also for food for the camels and for the poorer people. The wild flowers were magnificent, growing in such abundance and variety. Practically every piece of waste ground or fallow field was carpeted with them. Although we were unable to identify them, I regret to say, they formed a distinct feature of the holiday and we thoroughly enjoyed them.

We were without transport of any kind, so that we were limited to the birds we could see within walking distance of our hotel, or during the various coach trips we made to other parts of the country. However, fortune smiled on us. The rainy season in Tunisia lasts from November to March, but because of the nature of the soil, the rivers very quickly dry up, but we were lucky to find two wadis quite close to our hotel, each of which contained one or more sizeable pools, just at their mouths, where they run into the sea. The pool in the nearer of these wadis was bordered by olive groves on one side and by the grounds of a hotel on the other. The pools in the farther wadi were surrounded by open fallow ground.

We arrived at our hotel fairly late at night, so that no birdwatching could be done then, but what a joy it was next morning to see a Little Brown Dove (Streptopelia senegalensis) in the hotel grounds. The Tunisian bird is, of course, a different subspecies to the Indian one and is known locally as the Palm Dove. Later we found it to be fairly common, but what a pleasure it was to hear that delightful soft cooing again and to see once more such an old and ubiquitous friend of the Indian plains. Another very old Indian friend who introduced himself early on, and of whom we saw a lot, was Columba livia — the Blue Rock Pigeon, known in Europe as the Rock Dove. It may seem strange to Indian readers that anyone would get excited about seeing a Blue Rock Pigeon, but, generally speaking, pure specimens of this species are only found in the British Isles in parts of Scotland and Ireland where they are decreasing in numbers.

The Turtle Dove (Streptopelia turtur) was common, but we were surprised not to see its close congener Streptopelia decaocto — the Indian Ring Dove.

Later in the day we made the acquaintance of the handsome Hoopoe (Upupa epops), which was only to be expected, as the bird is comparatively common. We saw one or more on most days in various parts of the country.

It was not long before we both heard and saw the Crested Lark (Galerida cristata). This bird was very common and every piece of bare or open ground would hold a number of them. We looked at them very closely as they can be easily confused in the field with the Thekla Lark (Gale-

rida theklae). Of other larks which are also seen in India, we saw the Short-toed Lark (Calandrella brachydactyla, known as Calandrella cinerea by some authorities, including Dillon Ripley, as in his Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan) and the Skylark (Alauda arvensis) which did not seem nearly so plentiful as in England.

Shortly after seeing our first Crested Lark, as we were walking along the beach to Hammamet we saw a party of four Black Kites (Milvus migrans) flying over the sea just off-shore southwards from Hammamet. Three days later we saw eight more. The birds were obviously passing through, as on neither occasion did they seem to linger in search of food and soon disappeared out of sight. We were very surprised not to find any resident birds and thought they would have been quite common. This bird is the same species as the Pariah Kite of India, but a different subspecies. It does, however, extend as far east as the northwestern corner of India.

Birds of prey, generally, were rather scarce. We were obviously just a little too early to see the migrants of this family passing through in numbers. The Kestrel (Falco tinunculus)we saw on a number of occasions. On one occasion my wife saw one which had some kind of prey in its talons which it ate by tearing off pieces as it flew along.

One day on a trip to Kairouan in the steppe country of Central Tunisia an Egyptian or White Scavenger Vulture (Neophron percnopterus) flew right in front of the coach, affording an excellent, but momentary view. On the same trip, in the very far distance, two large birds of distinctly vulturine appearance could be seen circling, but could not be identified specifically. Incidentally, we soon learnt that birdwatching from a coach is most unrewarding. The approach of the coach tends to frighten away birds on telegraph wires, fences, trees, bushes or on the ground in the vicinity of the road; because of the motion of the coach binoculars cannot be used and viewing with the naked eye is impeded; and finally because of the speed of the coach the time available for observation is generally insufficient.

The only other bird ofprey we saw during the holiday was a fine specimen of a male Montague's Harrier (Circus pygargus) which, quite oblivious of our presence, flew quite close to us, hunting as it went along, but the bird did not linger and was soon lost to view and not seen again.

We were most struck by the paucity of Corvidae. I believe I am right in saying that during the whole of our holiday we did not see a single Carrion Crow (Corvus corone), Rook (Corvus frugilegus) or Jackdaw (Corvus monedula). At first, one is surprised at the fact that this general area has not evolved a species of crow which is peculiar to it, but one has to be constantly conscious of the fact that North Africa is in the same zoogeographical region as the British Isles, namely the Palearctic.

On our second day, we paid a visit to the nearest of the two wadis. We found that there was always at least two and sometimes as many as about four or five Kentish Plovers (Charadrius alexandrinus) present. One pair showed every sign of intending to breed, but I fear that the presence of horse and camel riders, holiday-makers and passing Arabs will prove too inimical.

On this day we saw our first Little Egret (Egretta garzetta). We saw the bird in varying numbers on a number of other days, including a flock of fifteen which we inadvertently put up, together with a flock of nine Blackwinged Stilts (Himantopus himantopus), as we came round the bend in a river bed. Flying with the Blackwinged Stilts was another large wader which we were not able to identify, but which was probably a Greenshank (Tringa nebularia), a bird we often saw, and pleasurably heard, but generally as a singleton. A close relative of the Greenshank's is the Marsh Sandpiper (Tringa stagnatilis). We had excellent views of this dainty, elegant wader for two days in succession and then it was gone.

Reverting to our second day, we also saw a Temminck's Stint (Calidris temminckii). Later, we were to see Little Stints (Calidris minuta) in fair numbers almost every day, rising to a maximum of 20-25 one day. The piece de resistance of our watching on this day, however, was the excellent views we had of a Little Bittern (Ixobrychus minutus) sitting in some brushwood at the side of a river. The bird was stalked and put up by a black and white hotel cat. The bittern flew about thirty yards further up the river bed and again perched in brushwood, but this time further out

into the water. The cat marked the bird down, got back on to the river bank, crept along until it got opposite the bittern and once again stalked it, getting out over the water in the brushwood. The bittern was, however, too alert and flew off further down stream and settled in brushwood even further out in the stream. After a moment or two, no doubt feeling that even this perch was too insecure from so persistent a cat, who was still prosecuting his murderous intentions, it flew about thirty feet up into some mimosa trees. All this, of course, afforded us excellent views of the bird, which we saw on a number of occasions subsequently, until one day we put up a female Little Bittern at the same spot, just after having seen the male. Once we saw two males on the same day in this locality.

Apart from the waders already mentioned, we saw Sanderlings (Crocethia alba) in small numbers — up to about nine, on most days. The same applies to Ringed Plover (Charadrius hiaticula), Little Ringed Plover (Charadrius dubius), Common Sandpipers (Tringa hypoleucos) and Dunlin (Calidris alpina). We saw two Wood-Sandpipers (Tringa glareola), and Ruffs (Philomachus pugnax) often, with a maximum number of five. We saw only one Grey Plover (Charadrius squatarola) in a pool by the sea shore, looking disconsolate and undecided as to whether to stay or to go. Eventually it chose to go.

Of duck, we saw but two, a White-eyed Pochard (Aythya nyroca), which got up at our feet from under the river bank and went off at great speed and a Shelduck (Tadorna tadorna), which dropped in for a few minutes and then passed on. There were a few small rafts of duck on the Iac de Tunis, but these were too far out to permit of identification.

The Grey Heron (Ardea cinerea) we saw on many occasions, as one would expect, but we were very surprised not to have seen either the Cattle Egret (Ardeola ibis: Bubulcus ibis of some taxonomists) or the Purple Heron (Ardeola purpurea). However, we were compensated by being afforded grand views of a White Stork (Ciconia ciconia) as it suddenly appeared flying towards us and sailed majestically overhead.

On our trip to Kairouan (founded A. D. 672 and the fourth holiest city of the Moslems) we felt sure that we saw a party of three or four Great Bustards (Otis tarda). They were a long way off and were only seen with the naked eye from a moving coach, but the size, general coloration and general posture of the birds, individually and as a group, made us feel that they could have been no other species. On another occasion on this trip, we thought we may have seen a Little Bustard (Otis tetrax) in some short green crops. We saw Pratincoles (Glareola pratincola) in flight on a number of occasions, as well as Grouse sp., but were unable to identify them.

Great Grey Shrikes (Lanius excubitor) and Woodchat Shrikes (Lanius senator) were common. The latter is a doubtful Indian species. We did not see any Redbacked Shrikes (Lanius collurio) this, however, is a very uncommon species in Tunisia.

The most colourful species we saw were, of course, the Roller (Coracias garrulus) which we saw once sitting on some telegraph wires and then later in flight; the Bee-eaters (Merops apiaster) of which we saw three or four on a number of days and which gave signs of intending to nest in the very suitable banks of the river; and the Golden Orioles (Oriolus oriolus). We were extremely lucky in seeing the last-mentioned species on about three days. One day we saw two females and another day two males. To make the experience even more thrilling, on one occasion they were seen at the same time as we saw the Roller and another time while we were watching the Bee-eaters. We had excellent views of all three species and were enchanted. To watch a party of bee-eaters, with the sun shining on their glorious plumage, flying about in the dry bed of an African river, flying up to prospective nest holes in the banks, catching their prey on the wing and then settling on rootlets growing out of the bank and beating them to death before eating them, is an unforgettable sight and provides a treasured memory.

Caspian Terns (Hydroprogne caspica) and Gullbilled Terns (Gelochelidon nilotica) let us down very unexpectedly, but I am almost sure that on one occasion we saw the former in the distance flying away from us. We did,

however, see three, or possibly more, Whitewinged Black Terns (Chlidonias leucopterus) one day and saw singletons on two other days. We saw only one Whiskered Tern (Chlidonias hybrida) which looked in at one of the pools one evening for a moment or two and then went on. Little Terns (Sterna albifrons) and Sandwich Terns (Sterna sandvicensis) were present in small numbers. Once we saw twelve Black Terns (Chlidonias niger). This species has been reported from near Delhi, but confirmation awaits a specimen.

Gulls were scarce. Of species common to India, we only saw a few Herring Gulls (Larus argentatus), Blackheaded Gulls (Larus ridibundus) and Little Gulls (Larus minutus).

Wheatears (Oenanthe oenanthe) were common and obviously passing through in fair numbers.

Wagtails were very disappointing, we expected to see large numbers of many varieties, in fact we only saw one or two Pied Wagtails (Motacilla alba) and about three or four Yellow Wagtails (Motacilla flava). One of the latter was a fine male of the Blueheaded race (Motacilla f. flava) which came and delighted us while we were sitting in the garden of a restaurant, slaking our thirst, on the edge of the Gabes oasis.

The oases incidentally, though beautiful, cool, luxuriant spots, produced few birds. Whilst wandering about in them, among the palm and pomegranate trees, and the crops such as wheat and henna which were grown beneath them, and by the banks of the refreshing streams, we only saw two or three Bee-eaters, one male Little Bittern and the Yellow Wagtail previously mentioned. We did, however, hear Hoopoes.

A species we thought we would have encountered more often was the Tree Pipit (Anthus trivialis), but we only saw two birds on one occasion. The Redstart (Phoenicurus phoenicurus) was also conspicuous by its virtual absence. We only saw one female. We did rather better with the Tawny Pipit (Anthus campestris) and saw a total of about three or four birds on about three occasions. We saw about half a dozen Common Whitethroats (Sylvia communis) and only one Lesser Whitethroat (Sylvia curruca). We felt sure we would have seen more of both species. In fact, the number and variety of warblers seen was disappointing. Nightingales (Luscinia megarhynchos) too were particularly scarce, with the result that we only saw one and heard one or two others. Spotted Flycatchers (Muscicapa striata) were coming through at about the expected rate and we must have seen about four.

One warm, sunny morning we spotted a Little Owl (Athene noctua) sitting in a completely exposed position on the roof of a small brick-built building in a wide open plain. The owl was so enjoying the warmth and sunshine that it was most reluctant to fly and allowed of an unusually close approach. The Scops Owl (Otus scops) we only heard. My note on the subject reads ' Heard a Scops Owl at night from hotel at Gabes and awoke to the call of a Hoopoe ' - for what pleasanter lullaby or clarion could a bird-watcher wish.

One day there was a particularly large gathering of Swifts (Apus apus) overhead, and I had hardly said to my wife that we should look carefully through them, in case there was an Alpine Swift (Apus melba) amongst them, when one flew into my line of vision, and was duly admired and enjoyed by us for a few brief moments before it drifted away with the rest of the gathering.

We were hoping very much to see the Little or House Swift (Apus affinis) on our trip to Tunis as the bird is reputed to be sedentary there, but never a swift of any kind did we see in or above Tunis itself.

House Martins (Delichon urbica) we saw in very large numbers, but Swallows (Hirundo rustica) and Sand Martins (Riparia riparia) in only fair numbers.

Of Stone Curlew (Burhinus oedicnemus) we saw but two. The first bird we saw was on a piece of bare, open ground, not far from a new hotel which was still under construction. It looked tired and as though it had just arrived, as it permitted a rather closer approach than usual. While we were watching it, a small girl with the few cows she was tending came along, and it was interesting to watch the bird crouch down and completely conceal itself in the irregularities of the ground, rather than fly away from the intruders who passed very close by. So well hidden and camouflaged was the bird that

we had some difficulty in spotting it again although we had pin-pointed the spot fairly accurately. My wife only caught a glimpse of the second bird as it scuttled through a hedge at the far end of an olive grove. This bird was much more active and on the qui vive than the previous one, although it could have been the same bird; restored to its usual state of alertness after a night's rest.

We finished the holiday on a very strong note. On our homeward journey, as we were travelling by car from Hammamet to Tunis airport, the driver had to call at a house at a point where the road overlooked the ' c lac de Tunis. We seized this opportunity to look over the lake, and confirmed our earlier suspicions that the large flocks of white birds we had seen in the very far distance, during a day visit to Tunis, were, in fact, Flamingos (Phoenicopterus ruber). There were at least three separate flocks on the lake - totalling about 200 birds. Finally, as we were taxying out in the aircraft, preparatory to taking off, I spotted through the cabin windo three or four Pratincoles fly down and settle on one of the runways, some twenty-five or thirty yards away from the aircraft. What an appropriate finale to a thoroughly enjoyable holiday watching birds in the African wind and sun.

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A BIRD IN THE BACK-YARD IS WORTH TWO (OR MORE) IN THE BRUSH

Winston Creado

I live in a coconut grove at Juhu, and I would like to write about the birds which visit my garden.

There are of course, the common birds like the ashy wren-warbler and the tailor birds which whistle cheerily as they hop from the casuarinas to the coconut trees. There is a pair of redvented bulbuls which built their nest last year in a red Ixora bush. I once saw a bulbul enter a grove of broom grasses, and emerge a moment later with a four-inch gecko lizard writhing in its bill, then beat it on the ground till it was dead and then fly off with it.

A pair of golden orioles frequents the place, and also a rufousbacked shrike, that masked predator, with its lovely back of rusty peach; there is a magpie-robin which I hear piping in the dreamy hush of noon, and a pair of crimsonbreasted barbets (coppersmiths). Pied and grey wagtails and hoopoes come on rare occasions.

There is also a whitebreasted kingfisher which comes on Sundays and public holidays. Sometimes I hear its cachinatory cry, and rush out in time to see it winging across the garden with flashes of opalescent azure, or sitting upon a palm leaf, dismembering a sand-crab before devouring it.

Often, it is the liquescent call of the crow-pheasant, ringing out through the pre-dawn silence, that first intrudes into the sanctuary of my slumbers.

And at night, one hears the owls, shrieking dementedly; or when I am ' Batwatching ' on the terrace beneath a pallid moon, a shadow glides stealthily across the moonlit pavement.

Purplerumped sunbirds come occasionally to the drumstick tree, and I hear them lisp excitedly as they antic amidst the nectar blooms, their throats and foreheads flashing emerald fire.

And only once have I seen a female paradise flycatcher, but never the regal male -- shy birds, they never hang around, but glimmer through the foliage and are gone.

On winter mornings, a host of bee-eaters haunts the casuarina's slender spire which towers above my terrace. They are ethereally graceful, these

birds, as they soar out into the sunlight and glide on wings of tarnished gold, lapping up insects with an audible snap of their slender bills. But the King Crow or Drongo is there too, watching with his r ruby eye, and whenever a bee-eater catches a really succulent insect, the nigrescent tyrant plunges in pursuit, and there follows the most spectacular aerial display that I have ever witnessed, as the screeching king crow bears down upon the bee-eater, soaring, whirling, diving, plummetting, like a winged fury, till the vanquished bee-eater is forced to disgorge its prey.

At the end of the monsoons two little whitethroated munias started to build their nest in the bare casuarina tree which had been denuded of its foliage by the devastating southwest wind. The tree is scarcely four feet away from my room window, and I enjoyed watching them go about their nest-building -- they looked so ineffably cute, sitting side by side in the little straw shelter. A fortnight or so later, however, they suddenly abandoned the nest without giving any reason for doing so, and did not return to it. This hardly seems surprising, really, for my house is filled with talk and laughter, and there is always frenetic rhthym blaring forth from a formidable array of transistors, tape-recorders, etc. However, being a rather honest person, I am forced to admit that it must, after all, have been my singing which really drove them away. Now only a few dishevelled strands of straw remain, blowing disconsolately in the wind.

There are others, too. Well-groomed mynas squabble over Agama lizards, ashy swallow-shrikes circle overhead, looking like exaggerated swallows, or perch upon the casuarina's swaying pinnacle; whilst occasionally, a parakeet will disengage itself from a traversing flock and alight in the garden to feast upon sunflower seeds. Night herons nestle amidst the filigreed foliage of the gul-mohur and sometimes, in a sapphire sky, I see a silverheaded brahminy kite, soaring far aloft, majestic and remote, above the turmoil and the fret of earth. A pair of Spotted Doves resides here, and their resonant cooing fills the morn with plaintive melody.

About mid December, I tood a trip to Tansa Lake. The Flame of the Forest was in bloom, and on these trees I saw many birds -- the Yellowbacked sunbirds, the males, though out of breeding plumage, had their throats and chests of irridescent scarlet; the purple sunbirds, the males were beginning to lose their lustrous plumage, though one male I saw still retained its nuptial splendour, even the red and yellow pectoral tufts; the lovely goldfronted chloropses, probing into the salmon-orange blossoms with their delicately downcurved beaks; and the lemon white-eyes and the common iora.

One day I set out as dawn was breaking over the eastern range. Frail woodland spices were wafted on the vernal breath of morn, and a flood of matutinal melodies poured out of the wakening forest. Coming to a field at the edge of the woods, I spotted a crow-pheasant skulking insome bushes beside the road, and stopped to admire his glossy black plumage, resplendent as a bird of paradise (and I read in Arthur Singer'sbook, that relationship of the drongos with the Birds of Paradise is suggested by some ornithologists. A brilliant goldenbacked woodpecker was tapping the trunk of a tall teak tree, and babblers and tree-pies were chattering away in the trees bordering the field. A little way off, a pair of plump and fluffy little grey tits was romping in the bushes by the tiny rivulet. So many lovely birds, and in such plain view too.

Late the following night, a group of acquaintances arrived at the bungalow, bringing with them a bird which they insisted was a Nightjar. It had crouched by the side of the road, blinded by the beam of their car's headlamps, and they had simply lifted it off the ground and brought it with them. As I was asleep at the time, they kept it in a cupboard all night and gave it to me the next morning. I immediately recognized it to be a Stone Curlew, and not a Nightjar at all -- the markings on the face of this bird give it an unmistakeably stupid expression. I carried it out into the jungle with me and released it. It flew off without so much as a backward glance -- rather ill-mannered of it.

I think I should include a note on the crows in Tansa, which were the boldest I have ever encountered. They would insist on sitting with us at table, and on sampling every dish, if we were not vigilant enough. One afternoon I was in the verandah, listening to the classical music programme from Bombay; I left the transistor on and went inside for a moment. When I returned, two crows were perched upon the handlebar of the transistor, listening, enraptured, to one of Bach's cantatas.

I must conclude on a happy note: The two munias have returned to the casuarina tree after an absence of nearly four months. They have reconstructed their nest in the very same spot, and are once more intensely involved in their amatory endeavours (whatever that means).

BEHAVIOUR OF THE YELLOWTHROATED SPARROW, PETRONIA XANTHOCOLLIS

R. K. Ghose

Yellowthroated Sparrow, Petronia xanthocollis (Burton), is known to build its nests in tree holes or in old nest holes of parrots, woodpeckers and barbets (Ali, 1961; Whistler and Kinnear, 1963). The author, during a fossil collection trip to Multai in Betul District of Madhya Pradesh, noticed a few Yellowthroated Sparrows occupying the deserted nests of the Common Weaver Bird, Ploceus philippinus (Linnaeus), on Acacia trees growing by a ravine. This observation was made in the first week of June, 1967, the breeding period of these sparrows.

The baya nests, probably built in the previous nesting season, were made of strips of grass blades and palm leaves. There were no other large trees in the vicinity except the Acacia trees scattered on the banks of the ravine. It was noticed that each baya nest was occupied by one sparrow every evening from dusk to next morning. Three nests were examined for eggs or hatched-out egg-shells, but nothing was found.

In the absence of positive evidence, it is difficult to say whether the Yellowthroated Sparrow simply roosted in abandoned baya nests, or was breeding there. It is known that some birds like the Whitethroated Munia, Lonchura malabarica (Linn.) breeds in nests of the bayas (Hume, 1890; Ali, 1961).

It will be of interest to know whether the Yellowthroated Sparrows use abandoned nests of bayas for roosting at night in the absence of suitable roosting sites in the vicinity, or actually nest there like the Whitethroated Munia.

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BIRDWATCHING AT MARVE ISIAND, BOMBAY - INCLUDING SIGHTING THE PIED CRESTED CUCKOO - DURING AN ALL TOO SHORT WEEK-END IN EARLY JUNE 1969

D. A. Stairmand

I was at my Company's beach shack at Erangol, Marve, over the week-end of 7th and 8th June, 1969, during which time there were several showers -- the monsoon having ' arrived ' in Bombay on 2nd June or thereabouts - but these lasted only a few minutes each and the sun shone a great deal of the time. The fact, I was more sunburned after that week-end than I had been at any time since the end of the 'winter '.

During the ' winter ' the seashore itself had many birds - winter visitors - but during early June the only birds I saw along the shore were four Gullbilled Terns (Gelochelidon nilotica) flying over the waves near the beach and Paddy Birds (Ardeola grayii) fishing, here and there, off rocks.

On telegraph wires near the end of the main beach I saw 11 Common Green Bee-eaters (Merops orientalis) and noticed that at least three of these birds had yellow, or yellowish, throats. I concentrated on a young, and small bird which sat on a telegraph wire between two adult birds. At frequent intervals one or other of the adult birds would leave the wires, capture an insect, fly gracefully back to the wires very close to the young bird, then batter the insect to death on the wires before feeding it to the young bird, who was impatient to receive the offering. Always at least one adult bird would stay next to the young bird on the wires. Only once, in half an hour or so, did the young bird fly. It flew diagnonally down to a rock where it stayed for over a minute, then flew back to the same place on the telegraph wires. On this flight it was accompanied by an adult bird. Next day, 8th June, I observed a young Common Green Bee-eater on the branch of a Coral (Erythrina) and this bird also had a yellow throat. There was an adult bird on this Coral and the young bird was almost as large as the adult one. The adult bird appeared to be disinclined to feed the young bird as when the adult returned to the coral tree with an insect it chose to fly to a branch somewhat away from where the young bird was perched. Only when the young bird persistently, and insistently, flew close to, and solicited food from the adult was it fed. This young bird made many short, ungainly sallies of its own after insects but, except one, entirely without success. The sallies were only of a very few yards distance and clumsily executed: so unlike the graceful (and successful) sallies one comes to expect of Bee-eaters. On the occasion when the young bird was successful in capturing an insect it returned to a branch of the coral but instead of battering the insect to death in the approved fashion, it appeared to attempt to crush the insect to death with its bill. Eventually, after quite a struggle, the insect was swallowed. Of the Common Green Bee-eater ' The Birds of Bombay and Salsette ' by Salim Ali and Humayun Abdulali states: ' Breeding: We have no record of nests in Bombay or Salsette, but the birds breed freely at and in the neighbourhood of Alibag across the harbour '. It would appear to me that Merops orientalis has bred at Marve this year.

Many moments of great pleasure were derived by me from watching a pair of Small Minivets (Pericrocotus cinnamomeus) bringing food to feed their nestlings in a nest about 7 feet up in a Kusim (Schleichera oleosa). I luckily chanced upon the Small Minivets when I sat down on a stone to watch Coppersmith Barbets, bulbuls and a male koel eating berries on a tree nearby. The Kusim was immediately behind me and the parent Small Minivets continually flew from their nest to and fro over my left shoulder uttering their feeble swee-swee. Quite often the male would fly away from the nest first and perch on some bushes just 10 feet in front of me, awaiting his mate. When the female joined him they would both fly away to gather more food. The nest was completely unattended at these times, for periods up to 3 minutes. The male's

black and orange-crimson were beautiful in the sunlight. I did not try to inspect the nest to see the nestlings but heard noises coming from the nest.

In a mango orchard just off the main road at Marve there was a pair of Whitespotted Fantail Flycatchers (Rhipidura albogularis) which are always a pure delight to watch dancing, waltzing and pirouetting all the while fanning out their tails.'"So buxom, blithe and debonnair'" - Eha. "For liveliness and grace it is not to be surpassed." -- praise indeed, from Whistler. As I entered the mango orchard one of the flycatchers was angrily attacking a Jungle Crow (Corvus macrorhynchos) which was on the branch of a mango tree. To me, the Jungle Crow is even more 'Franckensteinish' than the hideous House Crow - Corvus splendens, indeed - and I was apprehensive about the safety of the little flycatcher, but it attacked the Jungle Crow with such verve and spirit that even the flycatcher's mate, who was close by, did not need to lend more than vocal assistance by way of angry calls. I caught sight of another Jungle Crow three mango trees away and got rid of that one myself. I supposed that the flycatchers had a nest nearby. Soon they were dancing, pirouetting and merry again.

Several of those pretty little birds, the Ashy Wren Warblers (Prinia socialis) sang excitedly from tops of shrubs and bushes and a male Tailor Bird (Orthotomus sutorius) made nervous noises as I walked passed a tree, in which he probably had a nest.

Directly after the short but heavy showers such birds as the Common Green Bee-eaters, bulbuls and Coppersmith Barbets showed signs of having been heavily drenched but the beautiful pairs of Purplerumped Sunbirds (Nectarinia zeylonica) never looked other than immaculate. There was a pair that paid numerous visits to a bhendi (Thespesia acutiloba) in our shack's garden. There were many yellow flowers out on the tree to attract the sunbirds and it was delightful to watch the birds extracting nectar from the flowers, while having my breakfast on the verandah.

The Whitebreasted Kingfishers (Halcyon smyrnensis) - such glorious colours when in flight - were spaced around the area on telegraph wires and on trees overlooking small ponds. A pair of Common Kingfishers (Alcedo atthis) occasionally flew fast and low over the water surrounded by small mangroves, constantly uttering a sharp chichee. Once, one Common Kingfisher broke its flight to plop into the water to make a ' catch ' which was taken to a small mangrove overhanging the channel and eaten, while the other Kingfisher sped on.

The earliest Magpie Robin (Copsychus saularis) sang at 4.50 a. m. and a male koel (Eudynamys scolopacea) started calling at 5.20 a. m. In the gathering gloom of evening two night herons (Nycticorax nycticorax) arrived at a mangrow swamp with raucous kwaark kwaarks, and a solitary Little Green Heron (Butorides striatus) arrived silently in the same vicinity but uttered a peevish k'yow k'yow when disturbed.

Altogether, I identified 39 species of birds -- all fairly 'common ' ones - including a Pied Crested Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus) which I noticed for the first time on a tree in the back garden of our Shack, at 1.50 p. m. on Sunday, 8th June. Is this a record? (For this year's tardiest sighting, I mean).

CLOSE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN THE GREY WAGTAIL AND THE FOREST WAGTAIL

K. K. Neelakantan

Dharmadam Island springs all sorts of surprises on the birdwatcher. From the day of my arrival at this well-wooded spot with its mixture of deciduous and evergreen trees and cartloads of fallen leaves on the bare laterite ground beneath, I had been looking forward to seeing the Forest Wagtail. On 20.ii.1969 at about 6 p. m. I was glancing at the

branches of a large silk cotton tree to see whether the usual flocks of Greyheaded Mynas were there when a slim, minivet-like bird flew up and sat on a branch. As there were some Orange Minivets moving about in the area, I was about to move off thinking that this slim bird could only be a female minivet. But the bird began moving its tail from side to side! I ran for the binoculars and soon ascertained that it was indeed a Forest Wagtail. Soon after that the bird flew off followed by two others I had failed to notice. For a week thereafter two wagtails were invariably present at one spot in the shade of some large mango and jack trees where a lot of cowdung and dry leaves carpeted the ground. Of these one was a Grey Wagtail and the other a Forest Wagtail. The Grey Wagtail would be the first to catch one's eye, but a closer look would reveal the other at no great distance. However, when they took fright and flew, they went different ways. At times there were two Forest Wagtails together, but then they would be seen in a different part of the compound, not at the spot where they Grey Wagtail fed. The Grey Wagtail haunted this spot for many weeks before and after the brief visit from the Forest Wagtail.

Incidentally it may be worth mentioning that at the spectacular Yellow Wagtail roosts of Edanad a small percentage of Forest Wagtails used to be netted regularly. I do not think even a single Grey Wagtail was ever found roosting in the sugarcane. I found the Grey Wagtail roosting in a silver oak tree at Thekkady. Isn't this curous since the Forest Wagtail habitually perches on trees while the Grey never seems to do so? At Edanad there was no scarcity of large trees. Why should the Forest Wagtail have avoided these trees and preferred the sugarcane clumps? Is it because trees must be almost absent in its breeding places??

NOTES AND COMMENTS

A few days ago the Government of Maharashtra took an important step in the development of the Borivili National Park. As readers will recall we have been agitating for the preservation of this forested area for a long time, and now that National Park status has been given to it, it's its future is assured.

The Chief Minister introduced half a dozen blue bull and some barking deer into the forest on the evening of 9th June and there is every prospect of this group establishing itself here in the wild state and multiplying. It is also intended to introduce a few cheetal into this forest as soon as the animals can be procured. Cheetal are available in Powai Municipal Park which is a mile away, but catching them inside the enclosure without damaging them poses a serious problem. Some months back an attempt was made by the Forest Department Personnel to get these animals enmeshed in cotton nets but the project was not successful.

Readers may be interested to learn that the Indian Ornithological Garden which was in existence in Dhrangadhra and which was looked after by Mr Gyan Chand Jain has now been sold to the Maharaja of Jamnagar, and transferred to Jamnagar. We hope it will continue to flourish in its new home and also that the Peacock its official bimonthly bulletin will not be abandoned.

It is good news that the second edition of the Birds of Kerala by Salim Ali has been published. This is a volume whose production has been keenly awaited and is available from the Oxford University Press, Bombay. A review will follow in the Newsletter.

CORRESPONDENCE

'Birdy' day in the Nilgiris

Since my last letter to you, we have had one of those really 'birdy' days! There had been heavy rain after lunch, and the evening was sunny and beautifully fresh, and the garden was alive with birds. We heard a new call from a hoopoe, saw two birds new to us in the same tree within 5 minutes of each other, had a magpie robin, blackheaded bulbuls and the redwhiskered bulbuls hopping about very close to us on the grass, and the small sunbirds singing their heads off!

Mrs S. Jameson
Culmore, Coonoor
Nilgiris, 7 June 1969

Breeding habits of the Butcher Bird

The road between my home and my college is lined with babul and palm trees. Among the birds that I see most commonly on my way to and from the college are a number of Baybacked Shrikes (Lanius vittatus).

E. Thomas Gilliard (in Living Birds of the World) and Dr Salim Ali (in The Book of Indian Birds) have referred to the name Butcher birds given to the shrikes because of their habit of impaling living prey on thorns, spines and jagged ends of broken branches.

I kept a close watch on babul trees and barbed wire fences along my route for impale animals but failed to see any such signs of cruelty (?). I had almost given up hope, when my chance came rather unexpectedly. One evening, my attention was attracted by the incessant calling of a bird from a thicket of lantana bushes. Upon entering the thicket I found a small palm tree in the middle, on which was perched the source of the noise -- a female Large Cuckoo Shrike (Coracina novaehollandiae). On a nearby branch of the same tree was perched a Baybacked Shrike, busy feasting upon a small frog. The hindlegs of the frog were neatly pinned on to two separate palm spines and the body anterior to the pelvis had been completely eaten up.

I have not been able to guess why the Cuckoo Shrike sat nearby, making disconcerted noises.

A. P. Gupte
Zoology Dept
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Indore

Pied Crested Cuckoo

The Pied Crested Cuckoo was both heard and seen in Roorkee on 5th June 1969.

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 9—No. 8—1969 August



N E W S L E T T E R F O R

B I R D W A T C H E R S

Volume 9, Number 8 August 1969

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BIRDWATCHING ON A TREK TO PINDARI GLACIER

N. M. Mistry

The trek to Pindari Glacier at the foot of Mount Nandakot in the Western Himalayas starts from a pretty little village called Kapkote (3750 ft) on the banks of the Saryuganga river. When I reached Kapkote on a May afternoon Koels were calling from the trees and Magpie Robins were lustily whistling their mating songs from exposed perches. On the spacious lawn of the dak bungalow, Spotted- and Ring Doves, along with Hoopoes and Mynas were searching for tit bits, while Blyth's Large Whiterumped Swift's (Micropus pacificus leuconyx) zoomed overhead, braking and wheeling sharply from time to time. A noisy party of Blossomheaded Parakeets flew in and out of the branches of a huge pipal tree which was growing round a jamun tree. Redvented and Redwhiskered Bulbuls, Black Drongos, Golden Orioles, Blue Jays, Rufousbacked Shrikes, and Large Green Barbets were the other frequent visitors to the tree. On the river could be seen Plumbeous Redstarts, Grey Wagtails and the Common and Whitefronted Kingfishers. I also saw a solitary male specimen of a large Himalayan Pied Kingfisher (Ceryle lugubris) sitting on a rock which was half-submerged in the river. Late in the evening Black Partridges (Francolinus francolinus) started calling from the wheat fields while a solitary Redwattled Lapwing plaintively complained Did he do it? Pity to do it. Before I retired into the bungalow I heard the bird call that has thrilled me most on Himalayan treks -- the first call of the Common Cuckoo.

Next morning we set out for Loharkhet (5750 ft). The trek followed the course of the Saryuganga river for about eight miles and then swerved away to the left and went steeply up into the hills. The

Himalayan Whistling Thrush (Myiophoneus caeruleus) was now quite often seen on the river while Streaked Laughing Thrushes (Garrulax lineatum) hopped across the path and disappeared into the bushes by the side. Amongst the smaller birds Tickell's Willow Warbler (Phylloscopus affinis), the Dark-grey Bush-chat (Saxicola ferrea), and the Grey Tit were commonly seen. I also saw a male Verditer Flycatcher (Muscicapa thalassina) and a Goldfronted Chloropses (Chloropsis aurifrons). As we neared Loharkhet the Common Cuckoo was heard more and more often while on two occasions I heard the kaphael pakoe (Cuculus canorus).

Beyond Loharkhet there was a steep climb to Dhakuri pass (9500 ft) through a mixed jungle of spruce, deodars, rhododendron, oak, bamboo, and what the locals called Khanjh and Telang trees. The cuckoos were noisy that morning. The Brain-fever scream of the Large Hawk-Cuckoo (Hierococcyx sparverioides) and the pleasanter call of the Kaphael pakoe resounded through the woods. The twofold call of the male Common Cuckoo and the water burbling call of the female were also very common, while the Himalayan Cuckoo (Cuculus saturatus) occasionally called from the dark recesses of the jungle. The vocal supremacy of the cuckoos was, however, not altogether unchallenged. The Blackheaded Sibia (Heterophasia capistrata), the Great Himalayan Barbet (Megalaima virens marshallorum) and the Himalayan Whistling Thrush were all very vociferous. In these jungles I saw two varieties of Woodpeckers -- the Brownfronted Pied (Dendrocopos auriceps) and the West Himalayan Pied (Dendrocopos himalayensis), and two varieties of Jays -- the Blackthroated (Garrulus lanceolatus) and the Himalayan Redcrowned (Garrulus bispecularis). The Simla Coal Tits (Parus rufonuchalis) were very commonly seen while Scarlet Minivets, Yellowbilled Blue Magpies and West Himalayan Spotted Forktails (Enicurus maculatus) were occasionally seen.

After crossing the Dhakuri Pass we descended into the valley of the river Pinder. Near the dak bungalow at Dhakuri (8600 ft) I saw a party of Whitethroated Laughing Thrushes (Garrulax albogularis) and some Rufoustailed Flycatchers (Muscicapa ruficauda). I also saw a bird which I was not able to identify but later Zafar Futehally identified it for me as the male specimen of the Whitecollared Blackbird (Turdus albocinctus). Near Khati (7500 ft) I saw some Whitecheeked Bulbuls (Pycnonotus leucogenys).

I had not seen any Whitecapped Redstarts (Chaimarrornis leucocephalus) on the Saryuganga river but now on the Pinder river they were as plentiful as the Plumbeous Redstarts. At Dwali (8000 ft) I saw some Indian Rosefinch (Carpodacus roseatus), an Upland Pipit (Anthus sylvanus) and a Greyheaded Flycatcher (Culicicapa ceylonensis).

From Dwali the track climbed up steeply to Furkia (10,700 ft) through a thick jungle. We had to cross a number of frozen trees. I was accompanied by the chowkidar of the dak bungalow at Furkia who carried a loaded muzzle-loader with him. He said he would shoot some ' Munyals ' on the way. I was a little apprehensive at the way he carried the loaded gun on his back. As we neared the snows the jungles thinned away and the hillsides were mostly covered by tall grass and some stunted rhododendron trees. Presently, a fine male specimen of a ' Monal Pheasant ' (the chowkidar's Muniyal) rose into the air from our right and uttering a frantic alarm call passed over our heads to the safety of the opposite hill. He was followed by a number of hens at regular intervals. The chowkidar just watched them sail across the valley to safety. We also saw flocks of Snow Pigeons (Columba leuconota), some Alpine Choughs, Jackdaws and Rosefinch.

Between Furkia and the snout of the Pindari Glacier (13,000 ft) there was no vegetation except some small patches of grass. The landscape consisted of mostly rock and snow. Here the Whitecapped Redstarts, the Snow Pigeons, the Monal Pheasants and the Alpine Choughs were the only birds to be seen.

AMATEURS AT LARGE

A. Mangalik

During the Christmas recess last year, we visited the Corbett National Park. We had ' visited ' the park in the first week of November 1967, but were unable to go beyond one mile of the gate (the park does not open to visitors till late November) mainly because of the damage to roads during the monsoon.

My wife, our 9 months old ' birdwatcher ' (sparrows and crows) son and I left Delhi in the morning. After going through the apparently unending traffic congestion between Delhi and Ghaziabad, we reached the relatively open road to Hapur and went on to Muradabad. The new bridge at Muradabad has made the crossing of the Ganges much simpler now, but till the new approach bridge is ready in about three years, driving is still fairly tedious. From Muradabad one leaves the main road and proceeds towards Kashipur. The road here is narrow and full of a large number of potholes. This was the sugarcane harvesting season and we came across large convoys of loaded bullock carts which had made the journey a little slower than expected.

We finally reached Ramnagar around four in the evening. One of our friends was hunting in a forest block near the park and we decided to spend a day with him. The dirty road leading to the resthouse was winding and we were driving into the sun. We still managed to spot a large number of Whitecheeked Bulbuls on the way and while crossing a dry river, my wife spotted a peacock.

At dusk we finally managed to reach the Phanto resthouse. This was our first and probably the last experience with hunting. The next day, our friends shot some cheetal and partridges and missed some wildfowl. We spent a lot of time following the trails of a tiger. All in all, it left us with a bad taste. We did see some Large Pied Wagtails near the river bed while trying to follow the path taken by the tiger the previous night.

We left the hunting party after lunch and proceeded to the Dhikala resthouse, after having come back to Ramnagar. Between Ramnagar and the entrance to the park we saw number of myna-sized greyish birds with a fluffy white head. They intrigued and puzzled us till three days later, when Mr Negi, the Chief Park Ranger, was able to identify them for us, from our description, as the Western Himalayan Whitecrested Laughing Thrush. We spotted them at the same spot on our return also.

We spent the next threedays at the Dhikala resthouse in Corbett Park. Dhikala is situated at the western boundary of the park. It is at the end of a large silt deposit plain and at a bend in the Ramganga. There is a good view of the river and of the hills beyond. The resthouse provides all modern amenities. We had gone to Corbett mainly to see wildlife, particularly the tiger, and the next morning we set off by elephants towards a machan. We, however, were not able to see the tiger though the kill -- the bait -- had been reported the previous night. We did see some cheetal, blackbuck and wild boar. I was able to hike up beyond Buxar in the southwest corner of the park and saw a herd of wild elephants.

We spent the rest of the time taking short hikes or walks, and watching birds. We are real beginners and thus had fourteen species to add to our ' life list '. Collard Bush-chats were most abundant. We had seen these in Delhi but never in such numbers. We saw Spurwinged Plovers, Black Redstarts, Whitecapped Redstart, and Pied- and White-breasted Kingfishers near the river bed. A number of Grey Tits, Cuckoo-Shrikes could be seen in the trees around our room along with Red Munias. We spotted a Blackwinged Kite sitting on a lone tree in a meadow, and saw a Green Woodpecker and a Pied Woodpecker, and a Red-breasted Flycatcher in dry forest near the river. We were proud of

ourselves because the identification was made by thumbing through the pages of Salim Ali's book. We of course saw a large number of birds that Dr Padley and I called ' little brown ones '. Dr Richard Padley is a statistician working with the WHO in New Delhi. He has spent many years in Burma and Ceylon and is well versed with the birds of this part of the world.

During our stay we were repeatedly told of the Blue Magpie and the Scarlet Minivet, and were feeling slightly discouraged at not having spotted them, but on our way out of the park we saw both.

I would take this opportunity to state some of my observations regarding our national parks and sanctuaries and seek the advice and help of the other readers of the Newsletter. We had visited the Shivpuri national park in Madhya Pradesh in December 1966. This is a small park with a man-made lake and has a large number of deer. The lake attracts great numbers of birds. The park, however, is located in the midst of ' daccit country '. It has beenspared encroachment by industry and habitation but poaching is a serious problem, in this park on account of the bandits who camp in surrounding forests and who shoot animals with impunity. The Bandipur Sanctuary in Mysore has the same sad tale. The major highway to Coonoor in the Nilgiris runs through it and there is a fair amount of habitation within the park with a large population of domestic cattle. During the time that we had visited this park in September 1968, there had been an epidemic of rinderpest amongst the bison, probably spread through the domestic cattle. Bharatpur serves a special purpose and serves it well and I would be the last person to tell the readers of this Newsletter about Bharatpur. However, the water supply to the bunds seems to be at the mercy of the canals department of the Rajasthan Government and fluctuates considerably with detriment to the bird life.

Corbett, which is publicised as one of our greatest natrual showpieces, is also having a large number of problems and a sad tale. The size of the park is fairly small and too small to really protect the tiger. There is a lot of habitation within the park consisting mainly of various woodcutters. These people work for the various licencees who obtain wood from the forests. The road running through the park serves not only the visitors but also serves as a forest road to carry wood from the forests. The woodcutters with their frequent trips to the interior, their activities, and the movement of trucks are not compatible with the growth of wild life. The effective area for the roaming of the larger animals is cut down considerably by this heavily travelled road. Further with the proposednew dam, it will be still more reduced. For some reason, the policy of deforestation to ' save the wood ' has been started. This seems to be absurd from the point of view of the animals as well as from the point of view of soil preservation after the dam is built. We have to resign ourselves to the existence of this dam since it is now at an advanced stage of construction. Efforts, however, must be made to prevent in the future any such major constructions in the vicinity of national parks or sanctuaries. Information on such proposals must be made available to all those who are interested in conservation and ajoint effort with maximum possible public support must be undertaken so that such projects could be stopped before it is too late. The example of Glenn Canyon dam in the State of Utah in the U. S. A. should be remembered. Glenn Canyon is one of the most beautiful canyons on the Colarado river. It was, however, relatively unknown outside the State and a dam was constructed before even nature lovers knew about it. Subsequently when dams were planned in relation to the Grand Canyon National Park, the public voice was raised very early and the construction of these dams shelved. I hope that despite all our needs for electricity, irrigation, etc., we will not lose sight of the importance of our natural resources.

For the last 2½ years since my return to India, I have noted a considerable increase in the publicity for family planning. However, I feel this is still far from adequate. The reason I mentioned this here is that I feel family planning and conservation are intimately linked together. One of the main reasons why our sanctuaries are not able to

fulfil their function is that they are usually close to habitations and often have habitations within them. This is unavoidable when the pressure on the land is so great. As individuals interested in conservation, I feel we must publicise this aspect of the matter to the best of our ability and use the maximum possible pressures and actually attempt to reduce the population of our country rather than just slow down its rate of increase. Until then, we will not have truly worthwhile natural sanctuaries.

LATE STAY OF BLYTH'S REED WARBLER ACROCEPHALUS DUMETORUM IN THE PENINSULA

J. S. Serrao

It was interesting to read from the June issue of the Newsletter /Vol. 9(6): 9/ Mr Futehally's meeting with Blyth's Reed Warbler in Mr Melluish's garden in Madras as late as 16th May, 1969. The one which was being constantly heard and seen in Dr Salim Ali's Pali Hill garden since about November 1968 completely disappeared after 17th April 1969.

A still later record than Mr Futehally's for South India is Terry's published in 1882 in Stray Feathers 10: 476. Terry claimed having collected one at Pittur in the Palni Hills on 16th June, and ' afterwards ' having shot in the same hills one of a pair which he could not retrieve, the specimen having fallen in tall grass, seemingly implying that the birds bred in the Palnis. Terry's record has been discredited by the late Mr Hugh Whistler in his report on the Eastern Ghats Ornithological Survey when he reviewed the status of the bird in the then Madras Presidency.

As field observations on Blyth's Reed Warbler are often confusable with those on the Booted Warbler (Hippolais caligata) except when done by seasoned experts, a few last dates on which the birds were encountered from Cape Comorin to Bombay, may help birdwatchers active in this part of India.

During the Travancore/Cochin Ornithological Survey, Dr Salim Ali found that their numbers decreased from the beginning of April. His last specimen was collected at Cape Comorin on 11th April 1933. A post-mortem thereon showed that it was excessively fat, a prerequisite in migrants about to emigrate.

In the Nilgiris, William Davison found the bird abundant from mid December to late March. In the Wynaad his last specimen was collected on 12th April 1881 at Manantoddy.

During the Mysore Ornithological Survey, Dr Salim Ali found that the birds left the area from 5th March.

A large series of these Reed Warblers collected by the Eastern Ghats Survey in the Vizagapatam Ghats in March/April led Mr Whistler to the conclusion that they were getting ready for their outward migration.

During the Bombay and Salsette Ornithological Survey, Dr Salim Ali and Mr Humayun Abdulali came upon one across the harbour on 9th May, a date which they thought was exceptionally late.

Mr Futehally's encounter with the bird points out to the fact that in certain years an odd individual of this Reed Warbler overstays the prescribed dates in some parts of its peninsular winter range.

NESTING OF THE WIRETAILED SWALLOW (HIRUNDO SMITHII) IN KERALA

K. K. Neelakantan

During the period November 1968 to March 1969 I happened to visit four spots where there were recently constructed concrete bridges. All four bridges are in Cannanore district, North Kerala. At each there was apair of Wiretailed Swallows. Under three of these the birds had nests. On 21.xii.1968 a female was busy laying the foundation of a nest under the bridge-cum-lock at Kattampalli, not far from Cannanore; on 3.i.1969 and 8.ii.1969 a female was seen collecting mud from low silt-banks near the Cheeku bridge (a few kilometres north-east of Tellicherry) under which were the remnants or the beginnings of three nests, though only one pair of swallows was seen there. On 8.ii.1969 at Mambram bridge we found a nest which had been completed and furnished with feather-lining, and the owners anxiously flying round and round.

Dr Salim Ali did not come across the wiretailed swallow anywhere in Travancore-Cochin. Though the SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN includes northern Kerala in the range of the wiretailed swallow, it is not known whether breeding has been recorded from this area.

BIRDWATCHING AT HARSIL

Dinesh Mohan

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting the beautiful valley of Harsil situated at a height of 8400 ft, on way to Gangotri. The valley abounds in a large number of hill streams apart from the main river Ganga which flows over a fairly broad plane. It has also a large variety of birds and I am giving below a list of a few uncommon birds seen by me.

Black tit; Snow pigeon; Indian rose finch; Eastern meadow bunting; Himalayan gold finch; Himalayan whistling thrush; Yellow wagtail; White wagtail; Rufousbacked shrike; Himalayan green finch; Plumbeous redstart; Whitecapped redstart.

The tits are very common and are constantly flittering about in the pine trees. The snow pigeons were only seen in flight but I had a good look at a group sitting on a rock in the higher up regions at Gangotri (10,500 ft). The Green finch fly in flocks and sometimes the whole tree gets filled up with these beautiful birds. The whistling thrush is very prominent everywhere with its beautiful sone and carefree movement.

Harsil is a lovely valley indeed and is now connected by a motor road. It lies at a distance of about 140 miles from Rishikesh. One could make this trip at one stretch but it is good to break at Uttarkashi (3500 ft) which is again a beautiful valley and has the famous Nehru Institute of Mountaineering.

A GREAT GREY SHRIKE IN A SORRY STATE

K. S. Lavkumar

I was very interested to read in the July issue of the Newsletter an account of the feeding habits of a Baybacked Shrike. I had wanted to write about a Great Grey Shrike, something nice for a change, for several months now.

Last September a Grey Shrike was found by us while returning from Hingolgadh. It was in a sorry state with one of its wings totally lacking flight feathers! How it had survived in the first place was a mystery only explained by the fact that it lived in thorn scrub where it could get ample shelter from its enemies, while food was had without difficulty even for a handicapped bird which at best could only flutter a few feet off the ground. Anyway, the subject of this note came finally to grief apparently while trying to fly across the road just when some vehicle passed and we came by to find the poor creature completely dazed. A night's rest however soon got it back to its shrikian form and after a few initial forced feedings when the patient ungratefully used its beak to advantage, it started to take food proffered by hand. Meat very soon got it tamed and it speaks volumes for the bird's intelligence that it realised the advantageous circumstances it had found itself in, fluttering its wings and uttering soft throaty sounds at my approach. Nor did it batter itself against the bars of its cage as most newly caught birds do.

It was during the months that this shrike was my patient, that I got to admire the bird. What we call cruelty is the ingrained grit to survive in harsh and often remorseless environments. The habit of storing larders is not a pernicious quality, but an intelligent response to the realities of its habitat. Shrikes often must be going without food for long periods, and so when they come across a bonanza, they capture the prey in blind urgency, acquiring more than can be held in the beak, nor can the shrike eat its prey rapidly as often as not this is some hard shelled insect, and so these are deposited on sharp objects, thorns, barbed wires, etc. leaving the nimrod to hasten to capture more. Quite often it finds it cannot eat all it has caught and so the larder awaiting to be eaten at leisure. Shrikes are courageous birds for they frequently tackle prey quite out of proportion to their size -- small birds and mammals, frogs and reptiles. These cannot be dispatched efficiently nore eaten at one sitting, and so again the reason for the larder, a necessity and not a symptom of cruelty. Also, the fierce dash with which a shrike attacks its living food is a result of its small size and inefficient claws and bills for killing, so what it lacks in physical attributes it amply compensates in a temperament which at a casual glance seem ingrained cruelty. Shrikes are neither cruel, nor are they wanton killers; they are what Nature has compelled them to be, highly intelligent creatures making the most of their meager resources to live successfully in a world which by all standards is exacting.

Man has got into the habit of seeing his own weaknesses in animals, he should thus also see the brighter sides of their make-ups.

Incidentally this shrike died of overfeeding.

CHILKA LAKE AFTER THE FLOODS

R. N. Mukherjee & K. N. Nair

Recently we had a chance to visit Chilka Lake and we enjoyed the beauty of the area and its fauna. However, it would be nice if somebody like Dr Helen Spurway, at Bhubaneshwar* would contact the Government of Orissa to stop the mass killing of ducks on the lake, which is a source of earning for many people. These ducks locally known as Genda hans are sold in the market and also in the ghats of Chilka Lake at Gangrampur, Bhusandapur and Balugan, both alive and dead, at a price varying from R2/- to Rs 5/-.

We had gone for a faunistic survey of the brackish water especially protozoans. We saw thousands of ducks and most of them appeared to be wigeons. There were plenty of cormorants and also fishing eagles and gulls. In the marshy land adjoining the banks there were storks, jacanas and others. Most of the time the ducks remained in shallow water

*Dr Spurway has now gone away from Bhubaneshwar as her letter will indicate. Some other resident of Bhubaneshwar should take up the cause of protecting the waders and ducks - Ed.

but during midday when the sun is high they assembled in the middle of the lake. A small rocky projection near Kalijaya Island, about 10 km from Balugan Ghat and a hillock at Rambha, 3 km from Subolai village are covered with their eggs. They have selected a good undisturbed locality for breeding.

As we were curious about their feeding habits we dissected two specimens of each sex and examined the alimentary canal. It was full of partly digested weed and algal mass along with some broken shell of crustacea. To our surprise we could not locate a single helminth in their body. We did however found three species of mallophaga from among their feathers.

EXTRACT FROM News Bulletin of Nature Study Club, VISAKHAPATNAM, Vol. 1(2), April-June 1969 - Nests of Common Mynas

We have noted ten nests of Common Mynas during this breeding season, and inspected only four nests closely for their contents. Other six nests were simply noted down to avoid any sort of misunderstanding on the part of the birds. In all the four cases, we found eggs (1 or 2 in each) and the uppermost layer of the bed was green neem leaves. Even after two eggs in two cases, the leaves were fresh and what puzzles us most is regarding the special and particular collection of them in the nests. In all the cases the neem trees were at least 100 yards away, and in the presence of other leaves nearby what is the special affinity towards these neem leaves? Whether they have anything to do with maintaining the temperature in the absence of the parent birds -- or any sort of protection for the eggs from fugus or virus infections! Similar incidents of neem leaves in one or two nests was reported from N. S. C. Guntur in response to our enquiry.

Further studies may prove useful in this connection.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The International Council for Bird Preservation, whose President at the moment is Dr S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, brings out the The President's Letter from time to time, and the following is reproduced from letter No. 16 of March 1969.

Some of our readers might want to become members of the I. C. B. P., and they should write to their Central Secretariat, c/o British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London, S. W. 7.

'It is particularly interesting to members of the International Council for Bird Preservation to note the increase by careful management and control of two species of birds, one of which has now been removed from the endangered bird list, namely the Trumpeter Swan of North America, and the second which seems to be on the way to a remarkable recovery, namely the Whooping Crane, also of North America. In the first case, the population of Trumpeter Swan has reached the level at which it cannot appropriately be listed in the ICBP sponsored volumes on birds of the IUCN Red Book. In the second place, the remarkable population total of 68 birds of the Whooping Crane is an earnest of things to come. It is interesting to note that in the case of the Trumpeter Swans, the population had shrunk to 69 in 1932 and now numbers something over 3700 all told. Let us hope that in another thirty years, the population of Whooping Cranes may increase at a similar rate!

One of the interesting characteristics of the IUCN volumes called the Red Book on mammals and birds is the fact that this is a flexible, indeed a dynamic book. It is to be interpreted not as a bible and not as static. Rather populations of all animals endangered or not, tend to ebb and flow at various rates. In the same way, the endangered animals may decrease precariously, or may by contrast

increase encouragingly. One of the purposes of the Red Book scheme is to emphasize this by the colour of the pages on which the species are entered and by the characteristic rating system.'

The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, has established a Centre for Short-lived Phenomena. The idea is to get immediate information of ecological and geographical disturbances in any part of the world. A circular from them dated 16 June 1969 is reproduced below to give readers an indication of the type of work which is done by this Institution. Anyone interested in establishing contact with them would write to:

Smithsonian Institution
Centre for Short-lived Phenomena
60 Garden Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02138
United States of America

'1.) The heaviest concentration of dead birds has been coming in just south of Oregon Inlet. There were over 200 on Ocracoke Island Sunday. The southeast wind during the last two days should bring the birds north -- they can be expected all the way up to Virginia line with the kind of a drift that's on the water. They are verging out to sea past Diamond Shoales, so they come ashore more slowly in the north.

2.) The kill is confined to just the majority of this one species. The dead birds are of the species Shearwater, the ratio of dead found is 50 : 1 Greater Shearwaters to Sooty Shearwaters. They apparently died offshore in the Gulf Stream and are washing onshore from Beaufort to as far north as Oregon Inlet. A charter boat from Morehead City reported seeing more than an acre of floating dead birds. There seems to be a fairly good number still offshore. The birds were noticed Friday, but some of them were pretty badly decomposed, which would indicate that they were dead before Friday. One bird was cut open and apparently had internal digestive track hemorrhaging and one died of nervous convulsions -- frightened to death. The sick ones, before dying, just sit there as if in a fog, their only movement is to shake their heads as if aggravated, and when touched, they have no spirit anymore.'

CORRESPONDENCE

July issue of the Newsletter

May I congratulate you on the very interesting July issue of the Newsletter? There are so many new names which only your persuasive and persistent qualities must have brought out. I greatly enjoyed reading Sydney Reeves's account from far away Tunisia. How nostalgic he sounds of India, and how very like a birdwatching trip to this part of the country this seems! It is quite obvious that our birds are better at winning friends for India than all our Tourist Officers and publicity men. I would like to express many thanks to Mr Reeves for all the very nice things he had to say about some of his ' Indian friends ' he met there.

I wonder if Mr Stairmand would mind birdwatchers like myself visiting him for a spot of birding on the Marve island wherever this may be. It was indeed interesting reading all he had to say about common place birds which are never really common place to birdwatchers: ' A thing of beauty is a joy for ever ' (I hope I have quoted this right). Thanks to Mr Stairmand for sharing his pleasant week-end with all of us.

I always thought that the swinging set did not care much for birds, nor did they have an ear for bird song, but either I am totally wrong or Winston Creado is a notable exception. But then I think he lets the cat out of the bag by mentioning the two crows listening to Bach. Anyone who can get the Common House Crow (Corvus splendens) interested in

culture must be a person not quite of the swinging set, but if he typifies the swinging set, then let all of us swing more vigorously!

The monsoon here is once again stalling and there has been no rain after the very early and not asked for showers in early June. Things however seem to be building up as the usual wind is missing, it is horribly humid and hot and there are great masses of clouds all over the sky, some of them flickering away with lightening. All very hopeful signs, but one cannot trust even Nature now-a-days.

May I ask where Dharmadam Island is? It sounds an exciting locale for a week-end. If it is near Bombay, why can it not be popularised and the Government impressed on to make it a sanctuary? Of course it may be asking for too much after the liberation of the few wild animals in the Borivili National Park. But a large and wealthy city like Bombay can afford many, many recreation spots.

The single line from Joseph George hides modesty which is complete. I have had the pleasure of going out birding with him in Dehra Dun years ago. Please Mr George give us the joy of taking us out birdwatdhing occasionally with you.

K. S. Lavkumar
Rajkumar College, Rajkot

A Request

There is often supposed to be an antagonism between birdwatchers and aviary keepers. If an individual is one, he is not expected to be the other. I suspect that this is not completely true. Therefore I would be extremely grateful if any of my fellow birdwatchers could help me obtain living specimens of both species of Indian junglefowl, of either sex or any age. The more life history and locality data that accompanies any individual the better. I will of course pay capture and transport charges.

There is widespread experience that these birds pine to death quickly after capture. I have so far only two males, one of each species. Both have been exposed to somewhat rough transport, the sonneratii was bleeding from his neck and head, when he came to me, but I have been lucky, and they have been satisfactory and gratifying in the various conditions I have been able to offer them

H. Spurway
Habshiguda 16, Hyderabad 7, AP

The Purple Sunbird

As I was reading through our May 1969 Newsletter I came across three or four lines in K. P. Singh's article on ' Birds of Barh ' relating to the Purple Sunbird, that they live in non-breeding plumage maybe less than two months. He also states they are ' very commonly seen throughout the year. '

I wonder whether Mr Singh has an accurate record of the presence of these sunbirds for the twelve months.

This species arrives in Kathmandu, north of the Bihar border close to the 1st of June as Mrs Desire Proud pointed out several years ago in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. For three years they came on that date. Next year I recorded the 25th of May and this year a pair were on the fence above our wall on the 30th of May.

The male arrives in full nuptial plumage but within a week, begins to lose his purple feathers. By the first of July you would never know he was the same bird!

Here is a species which enjoys a long holiday after raising its young. Up to Kathmandu Valley the parents come to probe into the bases of cana flowers, only recently opened. They like honeysuckle flowers too. So for the next five months they are with us, then flock together as they descend to the plains. One male appeared the middle of January and still had his green, yellow and black plumage.

It would be interesting to know how general this northern movement

at the end of May is. Do birds from farther south come into Bihar and Bihar birds visit Kathmandu? Or is it a small portion of the more affluent population which spend the summer and fall with us??

I have discovered that North Nepalis living on the northern slopes of Dhaulagiri look for the arrival of the hoopoe in July. They say it is the only species which appears at that time.

R. L. Fleming
United Mission to Nepal

Random Notes

1) Two years back I wrote to you about a House Crow's pranks in digging and hiding a cigarette butt in the ground. It did one better this time. It neatly removed the soap case from a transparent soap dish, kept in our outside wash basin and lifting the soap dish in its beak flew away. I wonder what it could have done with it?

2) Sparrows. A pair of sparrows started building a nest behind the chick in our front verandah. Every evening I lifted the grass, sticks and other odds and collected and weighed them up. They are persistent builders and this process continued for full 18 days, after which they gave up. I wonder if anybody else has done this before? The weight of grass, sticks, etc. collected everyday was approximately 1 kg, i. e approximately ½ md. in 18 days. Amazing isnt it? Considering the small size of the bird.

3) Two breeding seasons have been observed in sparrows.

a) February-May, when the male is aggressive, keen and active to build nest

b) September-October, when reverse is the case. The female coms and sits near the male and demonstrates: shivering, sucing in and out of anal opening, etc. The male mounts but only reluctantly and half heartedly and this abhortive honeymoon seldom results in proper nesting and breeding activities.

Lt Col. A. David
Delhi

Appearance of the Blackheaded (or Brahminy) Myna in Bombay City

At some time after 8 a. m. on 5th June 1969, a Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum) was drying itself out, after a heavy shower, in the top of a Coral tree (Erythrina) close to Colaba Reclamation.

This follows my sighting of a Brahminy Myna at Vihar Lake on 17th May 1969, reported in Newsletter June 1969.

In April and May the Brahminy Myna became quite common around Khandala and I wonder whether there is a local migratory influx of these birds into this area during the summer months.

D. A. Stairmand
Bombay

/Mr Stairmand in Vol. 9, June 1969 issue, p. 6, refers to a sighting of a Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum) near Vihar Lake on 17th May. It is our impression that the Brahminy Myna arrives in Bombay and Salsette about September/October, and leaves in March/April. When they frist arrive they are usually in flocks or family parties and a great many birds in juvenile plumage are noted at this time. Mr Stairmand's recording of the bird on 17th May is rather unusual for Bombay for there is no evidence of the birds breeding here, the nearest known breeding localities are Panchgani and Khandala. His reference to a Brahminy Myna on 5th June in Bombay City suggests that this individual had escaped from its cage. - Ed./

Birdwatching in Mussoorie

Here at Mussoorie I have seen a few birds which I am not able to identify conclusively. Would anyone please identify them for me?

1. A sparrow-sized bird closely resembling both in shape and size, the rufousbellied babbler. The face and underparts are the same colour as the belly of the rufousbellied babbler, i. e. rather bright ferruginous. The crown, back, wings and tail are olive-brown. A conspicuous black patch in front of the eye and a black chin, as in the Cinnamon Sparrow. It was seen both at Rajpur (near Dehra Dun) and at Mussoorie in the end of May and the beginning of June on bush-covered hillsides. If seen in the open, it would dive into the bushes and skulk away. It uttered a call similar to the ' water bubbling ' of the female cuckoo. When uttering this call, it stretched out its neck and shivered its tail. It was solitary.

2. A flycatcher, which at the first glance I took to be the Rufous-tailed Flycatcher. It was similar to that shown on plate 33 of Dr Salim Ali's INDIAN HILL BIRDS, except for a very conspicuous broad whitish eyebrow, and a rather browner tail. It kept to the undergrowth and not to the crowns of trees as the book suggets. Its actions reminded one of Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. It was completely silent, and kept to open hill forest with plenty of twiggy undergrowth.

3) A bird similar to the Plaintive Cuckoo with blackish wings and tail. The tail was tipped with white. Beak and legs black. The body was deep grey like the cuckoo's but its actions were very different. It moved about on tree-tops warily and occasionally made fly-catching sallies into the air. It was silent and often associated with Shrike-babblers, Drongos, and Minivets. It was usually solitary. Could it be a Dark-grey Cuckoo Shrike.

Sudhir Vyas
Hillside, Mussoorie

/No. 2 could be Orangegorgetted Flycatcher (Muscicapa strophiata). In its description (p. 75 of INDIAN HILL BIRDS) curiously enough the chief diagnostic points have got left out! It has a prominent white eyebrow and forehead. No. 3, is a Dark-grey Cuckoo-Shrike. - Eds./

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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N E W S L E T T E R F O R

B I R D W A T C H E R S

Volume 9, Number 9 September 1969

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AVIFAUNA OF SINGHBHUM

Jamal Ara

The avifauna of Singhbhum is interesting because of the combination of geographical, vegetative, and historical reasons.

Singhbhum is a northeastern extension of the Peninsular Zoogeographical Subregion, and here that region meets the Central Indian and Indo-Gangetic Subregions. This results in the presence of many strictly peninsular forms, or such forms which are patchily distributed over the peninsula in forested mountains and make their appearance in the Himalayas.

The Himalayan Tree Pie (Dendrocitta formosae) is an instance of such discontinous occurrence. The race himalayensis occurs in the eastern Himalayas and the race sarkari occupies a restricted area in the Eastern Ghats near Vizagapatam. The Eastern Ghats form extends into Singhbhum and occurs as far north as Patung in the lahan. It is a bird like the ordinary tree pie but greyish brown with black crown.

The Grackle (Gracula religiosa) occurs in the Himalayas and again in Singhbhum and a small area to the south of it. There are several flocks of this Hill Myna (a favourite cage bird) southwards from Kendbai in the Kolahan and its chatter forces its way into one's notice anywhere in Saranda. It is a jet black myna with a orange-red bill and orange-yellow ear-coverts.

Two Central Indian forms also extend into Singhbhum, though these birds are rare. The Whitecheeked Bulbul (Pycnonotus leucogenys leucotis), has not been reported from any place south and east of Jhansi but has been seen at Patung. The gernal colour of the plumage is earthy brown, with white cheeks (ear-coverts) and brilliant yellow vent (under the tail). The Grey Junglefowl (Gallus sonneratii) is a rare bird in Singhbhum but does occur. surprisingly in the Kolahan, It is speckled and grey where the Red Junglefowl is red amd black.

The richness of bird life in Singhbhum is almost entirely due to its large area under heavy forests. The beautiful Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (Dicrurus paradiseus), which is more typical of the heavy forests of Assam is found along the valley of the Karo between Goilkera and Poseita. Another such bird is the Blackheaded or Blackcrested Yellow Bulbul (Pycnonotus melanicterus) a very beautiful yellow and black bird, which is pelentiful in the forests above Jate in the Porahat.

The pride of the place among Singhbhum's forest birds of course belongs to the Pied Hornbill (Anthracoceros coronatus). It is too big and slow in flight to be able to find shelter in open country and from Malabar to the Himalayas and beyond to Burma everywhere it frequents thick forest country. It is a much persecuted bird for there is a superstition that its oil is a specific for rheumatic pains and it is doubtful if this bird will survive such commercially-inspired extermination.



The Pied Hornbill is quite three feet in length. The head, neck, back and wings are black, so too are the two central tail feathers. The remainder of the plumage is a pure white, including the tips of the primaries and secondaries. There is a bare yellowish patch on the chin and in the female a white ring round the eye. The bill is a waxy yellow, as is the base of the casque for one-third of its length. The remainder of the casque which has a total length of eight inches, is black. These birds have eye-lashes, an unusual feature in a bird's make-up.

They feed in parties in the non-breeding season and from six to a dozen can be seen early morning and again in the evening flying one

after the other, from one banyan or pipal tree to another. A beautiful picture the birds present in their pied plumage winging with noisy alternate flappings and glidings.

The most curious fact about the Hornbills is their nesting. The female hornbill when the time comes for her to nest, enters a natural cavity in the trunk or a large branch of some tree, and there, without any further attempt at nest construction, proceeds to lay her egg or eggs. Her first egg laid, or even earlier, she sets about enclosing herself in the chamber by applying her droppings to the sides of the entrance hole until only a narrow vertical slit is left, through which the male feeds his mate regularly and devotedly until sometime afterthe young havehatched, whereafter she breaks down the side walls, these in the meanwhile having become so hard that no natural enemy such as a monkey or cat can have access to the inside of the nest.

The Nightjars force themselves on one's attention anywhere in Singhbhum by their calls at dusk. One rarely sees these birds unless driving at night when large-eyed birds squatting on the dirt-track are commonly met. These birds seem legless for they never sit or stand on the ground but just collapse on it and because of their brown and black speckling merge with it. So good is the protective colouring that the sight of a nightjar in the day is a rare experience. The birds can, however, be identified by their calls and in summer if one listens at dusk near a patch of forest one may distinguish the calling birds, as one does with the cuckoos, by their distinctive calls. The Longtailed Nightjar (Caprimulgus macrurus) says a chounk-chounk-chounk repeated up to fifty times at intervals of one second. The Indian Jungly Nightjar (C. indicus) utters a loud penetrating wak-kuhroo. Sykes's Nightjar (C. rahrattensis) has soft continuous purring note. Franklin's Nightjar (C. affinis) has a loud penetrating chwees-chwees. Common Indian Nightjar (C. asiaticus) has a scuttling south took-took-took-took-tukru.

The district of Singhbhum has 1678 square miles of its total 4500 square miles covered by forests, and the main two habitats in the district are: (1) Forests of the Western part -- Kolahan, Porahat and Saranda - and Southeastern part - Dublabera area. (2) Open country mainly in the north, centre and east.

In the open country there is only one large built-up area, that of Tatanagar but it is well-provided with gardens and trees and being near to the Dalma Hills has a bird population very nearly the same as that of village scrub and fringing jungles. Of course the built-up area casts its influence in the abundance of species which do well in human habitations: crows, mynas, bulbuls, sparrows, kites and vultures.

There are few large stretches of water. The only big one is the Dalma reservoir and its influence on bird life is largely indirect. It induces humidity and the surrounding forest has a bird population approximating that of evergreen patches along major streams in the main forest area. A noticeable bird of the Dalma area is the Large Greenbilled Malkoha (Rhopodytes tristis), a shy long-tailed member of the cuckoo family. This bird which can be recognised easily because of the poor light in which it is generally seen.

Other stretches of water are the large tanks near Chaibasa on which swallows and occasionally a few teals can be seen during winter. Deep down in the forest where the Karo is the boundary between the Kolahan and Saranda forest divisions, River Terns are quite common.

The cultivated area lacks in cover and shelter. Most of the birds nest in trees in the villages and such birds of course are only the crows, bulbuls, mynas, drongos, sparrows, kites, vultures, herons and storks. Occasionally a pair of Jerdon's Chloropsis or Leaf Bird or Oriole may be found.

The typical birds of the cultivated area, that is those which live and nest in the fields, are the larks, wagtails, pipits and bee-eaters. Strikingly noticeable in the open country of Dolbhum is the Ashycrowned Finch-lark (Eremopterix grisea), which often flits above the fields by

the side of one's car. It is much like the sparrow but has a black underside which cannot be missed. In rocky areas Indian Robin (Saxicoloides fulicata) and the Black Redstart (Phoenicurus ochruros) are quite many.

The scrub and village fringing is the belt where the open country and the forest meet. The bird population of this belt is largely of the leafy village but a few more typically forest forms are met with. For example the chloropsis, woodpeckers, lapwings and shrikes. Typical birds of the scrub and fringing are the magpie-robin (Copsychus saularis) and the crow-pheasant (Centropus sinensis). The magpie-robin is a black and white robin-like bird which is one of our best songsters.

The forests fall into four broad biotypes or habitats - the dense valley sal, the lighter hill sal, the dense evergreen associations along major streams, terminalia associations and the rather open miscellaneous woods on dry hill aspects. The bird population varies a great deal from one part of the forest to another, but that is a detailed study beyond the scope of the present essay.

The birds of the forest are generally more gorgeously plumed and longer-tailed than those of the open country, that is a function of the covers. Among the beautiful birds of the forest are the green ones - the Goldmantled (Chloropsis cochinchinensis) and Jerdon's Chloropsis. The two birds are so green that they are often described as leafbirds. One is wholly green while the other has a golden forehead.

The minivets are the striking red birds but only as far as the males are concerned; the females are as brilliantly yellow as the males are red. The smaller type (Pericrocotus cinnamomeus) is often in flocks but the larger, or scarlet minivet (P. flammeus), is more often seen in pairs -- red and yellow birds together. The Malabar Trogon (Harpactes fasciatus) is another red bird and is seen in deep forest.

In the forests birds get distributed not only horizontally with variations in vegetation but are vertically zoned too. The zoning is as follows: (1) tree-tops - chloropsis, blackcrested yellow bulbuls, minivets, large racket-tailed drongo, orioles, grackle, hornbills, green pigeon (Treron phoenicoptera) and purple wood pigeon (Columba punicea); (2) lower canopy - grey tit (Parus major), common iora (Aegithina tiphia), bulbuls, whitethroated fantail flycatcher (Rhipidura albicollis), yellowthroated sparrow (Petronia xanthocollis), yellowbacked sunbird (Aethopyga siparaja), purplerumped sunbird (Nectarinia zeylonica), and woodpeckers; (3) tree-trunks - chestnutbellied and velvetfronted nuthatches (Sitta castanea and S. frontalis), spottoed grey creeper (Salpornis pilonotus), and Pygmy Woodpecker (Dendrocopos canus); (4) undergrowth - babblers, bulbuls, magpie-robins, shama (Copsychus malabaricus) and thrushes; (5) ground - wagtails, pitta, sirkeer cuckoo (Taccocua leschenaultii), nightjars, peafowl (Pavo cristatus), junglefowl, red spurfowl (Galloperdix spadicea), partridges, Indian courser (Cursorius coromandelicus), and lapwings.

Another aspect of the forest bird population is their banding together in mixed hunting parties or localised forest associations. The parties move in more or less daily circuits and are representative of the population at all levels - babblers on the ground, bulbuls in the undergrowth, nuthatches on tree-trunks, tits and ioras in the lower canopy and minivets and chloropsis in the tree-tops. The composition of the mixed hunting parties varies from one place to another and as a general feature it may be indicated that in the scrub and the more open forest types the redvented bulbuls (Pycnonotus cafer) are the most numerous of any mixed hunting party; in dense jungle, their place is taken by the the redwhiskered bulbul (P. jocosus).

The historical interest of the Singhbhum area in ornithology is the fact that it was one of those areas studied in detail very early,

described by Tickell and so far many species the type-locality is Dhalbhum or Chaibassa. Three of these might be mentioned here: the Longtailed Nightjar (Caprimulgus macrurus), the Brown Hawk-Owl (Ninox scutulata) and Purple Wood Pigeon.

The Purple Wood Pigeon was described by Tickell from Chaibassa but is no longer found there. Deforestation has destroyed its habitat there and the nearest place where it can be seen is in the Bamiaburu Sanctuary, and there too neither frequently nor abundantly.

Apart from the birds indicated as rare in the body of this essay above, the following birds are definitely uncommon: Ashy Swallow-shrike (Artamus fuscus), Black and Redheaded Buntings (Emberiza melanocephala and E. bruniceps), Yellowbacked Sunbird, Greenbreasted Pitta (Pitta sordida), Forest Eagle Owl (Bubo nipalensis), Green Imperial Pigeon (Ducula aenea) and Indian Courser.

The status of the following birds is problematic. The Yellowbreasted Babbler (Macronous gularis) was reported by Ball but has not been seen again and may, therefore, be presumed as extinct unless fresh evidence of its existence in the district is forthcoming. Similarly the last specimen of the Whitewinged Wood Duck (Cairina scutulata) was shot at Sini over 65 years ago. There is no recent evidence about the existence of Singhbhum of the Jungle Owlet (Glaucidium radiatum). Of a nature different from these presumably extinct birds is the evidence about the Rosy Pastor (Sturnus roseus) which Ball reported as occurring in Saranda. This bird has not been reported from Singhbhum during the last 85 years but each year it visits other parts of India and as it breeds in the Middle East its disappearance from Singhbhum as a winter migrant does not amount to extinction but an unexplained change in migratory habit.

It is easy to assume that a bird is extinct if it has not been recorded in an area for a long time, but Singhbhum is a heavily forested area with few bird observers. The possibility of a bird existing but not being seen is always there. And there is at least one instance of a species reported extinct but re-establishing itself. The Green Imperial Pigeon had not been seen in the district for a number of years but since 1934 has been often met with in the Saranda forest division.

The other birds mentioned in the systematic check-list (unpublished) are generally common though their population varies greatly from one place to another.

It may be pointed out that according to Ripley (Synopsis) the Goldmantled Chloropses, race cochinsinensis, does not occur in Bihar. Will the author confirm that she has definitely come across both the races in Singhbhum - Ed.

A MURDER OF CROWS

A. Navarro, S. J.

One of the few birds found the world over is the Crow. With the exception of the Antarctica and New Zealand and some of the Oceanic Islands we find the common crow fairly well distributed on the surface of the earth. The main characteristic of most crows is their ability to coexist with man. Their boldness and sagacity seems to be as much a part of the crow's nature in as much as they have been able to thrive and adapt themselves in country or territory conquered by man's activities.

The crow enjoys the reputation of being considered the most intelligent of birds. The fact is that the pet crow has shown a great imitative skill and is capable of learning all kinds of tricks even to go so far as to learn a few words, though certainly not up to the standard of the parrot and the myna.

Like the crow, many other birds, too, have followed the trail of man; as examples we may cite the sparrow, the kite, the myna, and others. They may like associating with man for motives which are identical with those which the crow has, to follow in man's wake. But these others, unlike the crow, have kept very much aloof from man's affairs. It is only the crow that seems to claim certain rights and liberties entering man's dwelling, meddling with and upsetting whatever pleases it, and going so far as to challenge man with its importune and persistent, vociferous, harsh voices.

The Indian House Crow is **the** commonest of the Indian Crow family, a family, which boasts of forty-eight varieties grouped into eleven genera; but for our purpose we shall divide the crow into two groups; the THOROUGH CROW and the MAGPIES, TREEPIES and JAYS.

The crow is usually large, with more sombre colour patterns. The Raven and Carrion Crow are Crows of a high altitude, distributed along the Himalayan regions. The Jungle Crow is confined to the lower hills and plains of India. The Rook and the Jackdaw are, like the Raven, confined to the **high** hills of North India and as far out as Persia, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Ladakh and Tibet.

The Indian House Crow is the typical Indian Crow, seen anywhere and everywhere throughout the lower hills and plains of the Indian peninsula. The Magpie is a bird with a great variety of colour patterns. The two more outstanding birds of this group that have the richer and the most conspicuous are the Green Magpie and the Kashmir Magpie. The former, the Green Magpie ranges in colour from pale green to a dark green, with white tips to the tail feathers and red on the outer side of the primary feathers and the inner secondaries tipped with pale blue, the bill and legs, coral red. No doubt the Green Magpie is exceptionally beautiful; it is only when it talks that, with its harsh and sudden shrill sounds, it betrays itself and gives away the secret that it belongs to the large family of scavengers and carrion eaters.

The latter, the Kashmir Magpie is one of the most attractive members of the crow family. It is rather uncommon in India, but found in Kashmir, the Kumaon and the Simla Hills; it moves in pairs or small parties. The head, neck and most of the upper plumage is glossy with blue, green, lilac and purple shades. The rest of the plumage is white; it is a conspicuous bird when on the wing, with its black and white plumage, long wavy tail and undulating flight. Feeding mostly on insects, fruits and grain, it is not a scavenger.

The Tree-Pie and the Magpie have, in common, the large and handsome tail; some of the Red and Yellow Bill Magpies have tails measuring from 400 mm to 470 mm.

The Jay, too, is a high altitude bird, much smaller than the crow, always moving in small noisy and active parties in a manner much like the seven sisters. Most of them are a vinous brown colour, barred or banded here and there with black, whitish, lilac and blue shades.

In habit, the whole crow family is gregarious, noisy and social. Some gather together in large numbers, others in small parties. At the time of the breeding season they scatter all over the country in pairs and at times form small colonies. Once the breeding season is over, they join back into their communal gathering. They are all arboreal in their habits, even when some of them with their scavenging instincts, like the Common House Crow, feed much of the time on the ground, moving around garbage and rubbish heaps to satisfy their voracious appetite or actually scavenge around slaughter houses, markets and dirty localities. They also have many features in common inspite of the fact that some are so different in shape and colour as has already been pointed out. Nevertheless the Common Indian House Crow (doubtless) is the one that has developed the most gregarious and social instinct. It is curious to observe that its behaviour somehow will differ in large cities and towns, not forming a single huge unit or colony as will be the case in small villages and settlements.

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By way of example, the whole crow population of Bombay is divided into units or colonies, the size of these units depending entirely on

the locality where each unit has been originated. Let us select as type for the formation of these units the localities of the markets of Bombay, scattered over the city area and we will find that each market has its units. The size and strength of these units depends on the food supply that each locality can afford. This clearly reveals to us the standard of cleanliness and hygiene of each locality. Between these large market units, there are smaller groups. The best example that can be cited here of this small group is taken from the compound of St Xavier's High School as the centre for the two large neighbouring institutions, the Cama Hospital and the Elphinston Technical High School. We have a small unit whose strength is round fifty in all; all day long they scavenge over this area, and at night they roost in the trees around the school compound.

In small villages and country settlements the job of the Common House Crow as scavenger may be good and useful, but certainly not the ideal for large towns and cities. The crow may be a carrier of infection and thus become a menace to health. The gregarious instinct of the crow's nature is so well developed that even at night they gather in large numbers in the company of mynas and other birds, at a selected spot, to roost. Some of these roosting grounds have been inuse for many years and for generations of crows. These roosting spots sometimes are situated miles away from the village or town where the crows have spent the day. Some of the units in large towns where there are plenty of trees, will adopt these trees as their roosting grounds. There is an originality in the manner in which the Common Indian Crow takes to its roosting ground. Apparently the labours of the crow are over late in the evening, when to all appearances, it enters into a playful and restful mood, at times a group coming to the ground not in search of food, but for sheer amusement, bullying and chasing each other but not quarelling, making all kinds of harsh noises, all of a sudden flying off to the top of a tree or roof in the same mood and attitude, some others making short aimless flights to the sky and returning to the same spot; all this frolicking goes on till dark, when suddenly a whole group will make a dash for the roosting place and a quiet stillness will prevail for the rest of the night, except on an occasion when the strong light of the full moon may disturb their sleep and a chorus of harsh noises will fill the air, as a sign of protest.

PINKHEADED DUCK

J. Jameson

During the cold weather of 1939/40, I camped for a night on the bank of the Chhora beel*(jheel) along with two friends, Mr and Mrs Webb. (Bill Webb was later to build the famous swing railway bridge across the Suez Canal.) This beel had fairly dense sal jungle on three sides and lies about a mile or a little less, south of the Ajai river. The beel was rather shallow, with dense grass and reeds all round the comparatively small areas of clear water near the middle, and was infested with the largest buffalo leeches I have ever seen. In those days, the beel was extremely difficult to reach, and the duck on it could hardly have been disturbed at all.

*Chhora beel is in the Galsi Police Station area of Burdwan district in West Bengal, amile or less, south of the Ajai river. The Ajai is on the border between Burdwan and Bhirbhum districts in West Bengal. The Ajai flows into the Bhagirathi, which in turn flows into the Hooglie. The beel is roughly 50 miles east of Asansol.

My friends and I hoped to get a shot at the duck on it by forcing our way through the grass and reeds, but without success; the leeches finally forced us to beat a retreat! One of us fired a shot in the air to get the birds to rise. Quite a number of them got up, amongst which I think I remember teal, pochard and mallard. A section of the birds flew fairly low over us and in the good afternoon light, I saw a bird of roughly mallard size which had a dark body and a bright pink head and neck. The view I got was partly from underneath and partly from the side as the bird wheeled. I called out to my friends that I thought I had seen a Pinkheaded Duck which I knew to be rare. A few minutes later, as the birds wheeled again, we all saw this bird, and we agreed that it was almost certainly a Pinkheaded Duck. I used to be fond of shooting, and knew the commoner varieties of duck very well. I certainly know the Redcrested Pochard of which I have shot a number in the past, and the pink-headed bird I saw was certainly not the Redcrested Pochard.

EARLY WINTER VISITORS ALONG THE BOMBAY SEASHORE

D. A. Stairmand

On 15th August 1969, I recognised the following birds at Marve, Bombay

Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos)
Little Ringed Plover (Charadrius dubius)

On a further visit to Marve on 17 August 1969, I was able to recognize the following

Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos)
Turnstone (Arenaria interpres)
Iesser Sand Plover (Charadrius mongolus)
Little Stint (Caladris minutus)

On 15th August there were only a handful of common sandpipers along the rocks and sandy beach at Erangal, Marve, whereas by the 17th their numbers had increased by about fivefold. The Little Ringed Plovers I saw on the 15th August were in partially inundated fields about 300 yards behind the beach with paddy fields (and paddy birds!) intervening. I did not see any Little Ringed Plovers on the 17th August although I looked in the same area where I had seen some 7-8 two days earlier. I also did not encounter any of these birds on the seashore, although that is where I could always find them last winter. If partially inundated fields are available, the birds evidently prefer these to the seashore.

The birds I saw on the wonderfully sunny 17th August were, with the exception of the common sandpipers, all in one party of about 50 on the very rock section of the beach at Erangal. Besides those I could identify, there were possibly other species of plovers and sandpipers in the party.

The most striking birds in the party were 10 Turnstones (Arenaria interpres) in summer plumage with a mixture of rufous, black and white all beautifully accentuated by their red legs and feet.

There was a Sand Plover in summer dress and I took this to have been the Pamirs Iesser Sand Plover (Charadrius mongolus) described as follows in Volume 2 of the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan by Salim Ali and Ripley

' Summer (breeding) Above: forehead and sides of head black; crown and hindneck rust coloured or pale chestnut. Rest of upperparts sandy brown. Below: upper breast and flanks pale chestnut, spearated from glistening white throat by a blackish half collar. '

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My notebook contains all these details with the exception of the

blackish half collar. There were two other birds fairly similar to this one but in more faded plumage. I have been studying Plate 27 in Volume 2 of the Handbook in which figure 11 is the Large Sand Plover (Charadrius leschenaultii) but consider that I probably saw Charadrius mongolus although I did not note the black half-collar. There were a few amusing ' Territorial skirmishes ' between the plovers!

None of the above mentioned birds had been seen in this area by me since before the monsoon. My last visit to Marve had been on 29th June.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Nature Conservation

Conservationists in India are greatly encouraged by the fact that Dr Karan Singh, the Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism has been appointed the new Chairman of the Indian Board for Wild Life. The last meeting of the Board was held at Dhikala in Corbett National Park in June 1965. Since then there was no meeting held even of the Standing Committee, and in view of this the resolutions passed by the Board remained a dead letter.

Dr Karan Singh insisted in his opening speech that the Board should meet at least once a year. Also an Executive Committee has been constituted, the first meeting of which was planned to be held on 29th August.

The Prime Miniter, Mrs Indira Gandhi spoke with a great deal of feeling in her inaugural speech, and what is more satisfying is that she followed up the meeting with a letter to the Chief Ministers, which is reproduced below:

' I have been greatly concerned at the increasing decimation of our wild life. The recent meeting of the reconstituted Indian Board for Wild Life has confirmed my impression that the situation is far more serious than official circles are sometimes prepared to admit. Although wild life and forests are State subjects, they are an Indian national heritage, and what we do in the next five or two years will determine the future and how the future will judge us. I am writing to enlist your active cooperation, because it is only when leaders take a personal interest that things get done.

The proceedings and recommendations of the Indian Board for Wild Life will soon be circulated to all States. I hope you will ensure that they are implemented as early as possible. The carnage of the recent past can be ended only wif wild life legislation, on the pattern of the Maharashtra Wild Birds and Animals Protection Act, is passed in each State, and lacunae within this Act for each State's peculiar wild life problems are plugged. To implement this legislation, and to enforce it in the field, each State Forest Department should have within it, a Wild Life Department which might be strengthened where it exists already, and made to function effectively. Specialists should be trained and retained by the Wild Life Departments to give them expertise.

I think it would be useful for a State Wild Life (Advisory) Board to be constituted on the pattern of the Indian Board for Wild Life, with official and non-official members, which should meet regularly at least once a year, with more frequent meetings of its Executive Committee. The State Wild Life Boards could, among other things, consider the recommendations of the Indian Board for Wild Life and with their own special knowledge, recommend what needs to be done to the Forest and Wild Life Departments.

Poaching has become a lucrative profession in many areas. To curb this, all commercial transactions in game meat, the netting and snaring of birds and the poaching of animals for furs, meat and skins must be stopped. The immediate need is to prohibit, under threat of severe penalties, the sale or service in shops and restaurants of game meat. I would also suggest that the somewhat liberal grant of crop protection licences, especially within the vicinity of sanctuaries and parks, should be reviewed.

A Special Committee of the Indian Board for Wild Life will soon conduct a survey of national parks and sanctuaries. It would be helpful if the States could, on their own, conduct surveys of their wild life resources and increase the area under sanctuaries. Grazing and forestry operations should be minimised, if not altogether eliminated, in sanctuaries and parks.

A heavy toll has already been taken of wild life outside the forest areas and many species are under grave threat of extinction. You might like to consider issuing instructions to all District Magis trates and Superintendents of Police to organise Wild Life Boards at district dlevel, and enforce wild life legislation in non-forest areas, preferably under a system of honorary Wild Life Wardens which has already been worked with some success in a few States.

I have written to you at some length, not only because I love animals, but alsobecause our parks and sanctuaries could, in the long run, become great tourist attractions and thus more than repay the care and investment which they now demand.

Yours sincerely

Sd/- (Indira Gandhi)'

It will be seen that almost all the important points are covered in this letter and it is now for the States to ensure that this direction from the Prime Minister isput into effect.

Newsletter Book by National Book Trust

The Editor has signed a contract with the National Book Trust to publish a book on birdwatching in India consisting of some articles published in the Newsletter over the last ten years. The selections have been done partly with the assistance of Mr R. A. Stewart Melluish who has unfortunately left India and whose present address is: 1 Woodlands, Woodfield Lane, Ashtead, Surrey, England.

Mrs Laeeq Futehally has taken the trouble to organise the material on the basis of articlespertaining to the North, South, East and West regions of the country. The many excellent articles received from Pakistan have not been included as we wanted this book to refer only to the present political geographical limits of India.

Mr Peter Jackson had generously given a few of his excellent photographs of common Indian birds for inclusion in this publication. The royalties received from the sales of the book will be credited to the Birdwatchers' Club of India and will partly, we hope, cover the cost of producing the Newsletter. We hope that contributors will not be startled by this first announcement about using signed material in the Newsletter for a book. A formal letter will of course be sent in due course to everyone whose articles are being used in the book.

Birding in Upper Coonoor, Nilgiris

While I was at Upper Coonoor last May, every morning I used to take the road beyond Darlington bridge leading to the Tea estates circling Underfell in the hope of spotting the Nilgiri Thrush. I did eventually one morning. But the more rewarding experience was watching apair of Black-and-Orange Flycatchers (Ochromela nigrorufa).

The brightly coloured male was announcing its presence from a Eucalyptus sapling, 30 feet from the road on a slope. I settled down on a culvert nearby and trained the field glasses on him. Soon he was joined by his mate, a very similar bird, but slightly pale in colour. While the male went on calling chik-kii, the female kept inspecting a small casuarina tree, right beneath the culvert on which I was sitting. Closer inspection revealed a neatly built cup-shaped nest, wedged between two branches. The nest was built mostly of dried casuarina leaves and grass. There were no eggs.

I saw them at the same place in the subsequent mornings. Other birds I watched on that road were the Scimitar Babbler, that unfailing entertainer the Fantailed Flycatcher, the scintillating singer Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, chestnut-headed bee-eater, scores of white-eyes and alone Blackbacked Pied Flycatcher-Shrike (Hemipus picatus).

S. Theodore Baskaran
Poothicote, Vellore 2

Pheasant-tailed Jacana in Kerala

In Keralathile Pakshikal by Sri K. K. Neelakantan, Pheasant-tailed Jacana is described as a very rare bird of Kerala. It is also seen that no one has recorded its nesting from Kerala so far. Therefore Dr Salim Ali in his second edition of Birds of Travancore and Cochin published recently as Birds of Kerala, under status and habitat of this bird has stated as ' presumably resident ' (p. 103).

I have seen quite a large number of these birds on either side of the railway line south of Kanhangad Railway Station (Southern Railway) in Cannanore District. A visit to this place during SW. monsoon months will definitely show that the bird is not rare at least in this part of Kerala. All the birds seen by me during August 1965 (2.viii.1965) were in breeding plumage. Therefore I presume that the birds must be breeding here. These low-lying marshy areas on either side of the railway line will have water only during SW. monsoon months. During summer it will be completely dry. From this it can be inferred that the birds are subject to some local migration also because all the surrounding areas to a radius of several miles will be completely dry till the commencement of the next SW. monsoon.

Since its breeding has not been recorded in Kerala so far except the record of the presence of an oviduct egg in a specimen collected at Alwaye during SW. monsoon, a visit to this place during the months of July-August is likely to throw some light on its breeding in Kerala.

K. N. Nair
Kerala Forest School
Walayar, Palghar

Newsletter for August 1969

Just a few comments on the August issue of the Newsletter.

If there is need for a comment on the sighting of a Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum) in Bombay, what may be the comments on my seeing a pair of these little mynas at Manali in cultivation at about 7000

feet in the last week of May this summer?

I have a little secret to let out of the bag: Dr A. Manglik who has written of his visit to the Corbett National Park has this summer been on a very profitable birdwatching excursion to Sikkim. I hope he will write something on this visit, for I am made to understand that he saw many interesting birds.

I was complaining about the rains last month. Well the great season has at last arrived, there is a continual drip, drip, drip and nothing else. It just does not decide to collect itself together and start pouring! Fortunately in the surrounding districts there has been heavy rain but we here are yet waiting for the shower of the year. Unless there is a heavy downpour, our water reserves will be sadly depleted next summer and this will mean the death of a number of old trees. A fine peepal which attracted many birds each March has barely seen the hot season through. Another will surely seal its fate if the roots are not drenched.

R. N. Mukherjee and K. N. Nair would like to have some one do something about the birds being killed in the Chilka Lake area. This appeal need to be made for all regions of the country and one sometimes wonders where to start and where to stop and this also not only regards birds, but also insects, mammals, vegetation and in fact all forms of life. I would say, can we not all request the Bombay Natural History Society to ask Government to appoint a person to draw up a report on the situation as it is today. From this report, a comprehensive set of suggestions could be drawn up, keeping in view the fact that India is a Democracy and no legislation will be of any avail unless there is a linking of the local population with the endeavour. The local people must be made aware of the value of the vegetation and the animal life of their region and each National Park must be closely linked with the local development, so that the people concerned the most, the local people, will help in preserving their natural wealth. Unless this is done, we can as well whistle for the wind, or pray for the rain.

As far as the vegetation is concerned, we are now in a position to bring the facts forcibly home to people suffering from floods and recurring droughts that they can most effectively halt these scourges by caring for the plant life of their area. Once they realise the link, they themselves will see that things improve. This will be the first and very important step in the right direction. After it is taken, the others will follow most logically.

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BIRDWATCHERS

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SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE BIRDS AT JAWAI DAM

Bhagwan Dass Rana

On 14th January, 1969 I seized an opportunity of observing the birds at Jawai dam near Erinpura road. The dam is on the river Jawai which is a tributory of the Luni. The region surrounding the dam is composed of granite outcrops. Water is supplied from the dam for irrigation and for drinking purposes to Jodhpur. A well-maintained dak bungalow amidst a beautiful garden is quite an attraction for birdwatchers. I watched birds in the vicinity of the dam for five days and have tried to summarise my observations in this note.

When I reached the dam in the morning, I saw many Redwattled Lapwings (Vanellus indicus) flying on the bank of the water canal. Little stints (Calidris minutus) were also common. A little cormorant (Phalacrocorax niger) was observed catching a fish in its beak on the surface of the water near a huge stone. The darter (Anhinga rufa) was a common aquatic bird there. The Painted Stork (Ibis leucocephalus), the Pond Heron (Ardeola grayii) and the Little Egret (Egretta garzetta) were standing in shallow water. Before dusk, I saw Palm Swifts (Cypsiurus parvus) and then the Blue Rock Pigeon (Columba livia) flying near the dam and the Pied Kingfisher (Ceryle rudis) and the Common Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis) perched on rocks and branches of Acacia trees. The Fishing Eagle (Haliaeetus leucoryphus) and the Golden Plover (Pluvialis apricaria) were located along the grassy edge of the river.

Two days after my arrival, I went for an early morning walk in the garden, which was mainly composed of mango groves. The shrill calls of the Redvented Bulbul (Pycnonotus cafer) attracted my attention, but surprisingly not a single Yellowvented Bulbul (Pycnonotus leucogenys) was observed. The Tree-pie (Dendrocitta vagabunda) and the Roseringed Parakeet (Psittacula krameri) were observed thriving upon some fruits of Zizyphus mauritiana.

I went farther into middle of the mango grove and was surrounded by various birds, e. g. the Common Babblers (Turdoides caudatus), the Magpie-Robin (Copsychus saularis), the Common Myna (Acridotheres tristis), and the Bank Myna (Acridotheres ginginianus). The Whitebellied Drongo (Dicrurus caerulescens) and the Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) were very common here and the Black and White Wagtails (Motacilla maderaspatensis) weredominating the scene with their conspicuous movements. I also saw one or two birds of the Grey Wagtail species (Motacilla caspica). The Ring Dove (Streptopelia decaocto), the Little Dove (Streptopelia senegalensis), and the Pied Bush Chat (Saxicola caprata) were also common here.

The Grey Partridge (Francolinus pondicerianus) and the Painted Partridge (Francolinus pictus) were observed in large numbers only in the Range Management and Grassland area of this Institute (Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur) situated nearby. I could also see here a Jungle Bush Quail (Perdicula asiatica) with its eggs under a bush of Zizyphus nummularia.

The nearby soil patched, have good grass covers composed of Cymbopogon jwarancusa, Aristida, Eremopogon, Heteropogon, Eragrostis ciliaris, Dichanthium annulatum and Dactyloctenium scindicum; among the weeds here are: Tephrosia purpurea, Indigofera cordifolia, etc.

On the third day I noticed a Grey Shrike (Lanius excubitor)perched on the branches of a Caparis decidua tree. Only one Rufous Woodpecker (Micropternus brachyurus) was observed perched on Prosopis cineraria. When I entered deep in the area, a Black Bird (Turdus merula)with its black cap was seen hopping on the wire fencing and at times on the ground. After a few minutes, a group of 8-10 Common Sand Grouse (Pterocles exustus)emitting typical sound could be seen.

When I went to the cultivated fields of wheat near a village, I saw the Grey Tit (Parus major)clinging to flowering shoots and to small Calotropis procera growing on the bunds of the fields. The Raven (Corvus corax) and the Crow Pheasant (Centropus sinensis) were also common. An Orphean Warbler (Sylvia hortensis) was observed hopping singly amidst thorny bushes.

When I reached somewhat gravelly soil at a distance of 6-8 feet, I saw the Pied Bush Chat (Saxicola caprata) emerging from grassy land, and observed a pair of Indian Robin (Saxicoloides fulicata) and a few crested larks (Galerida cristata) there.

Early in the morning of the fourth day of my arrival in the area, I observed a pair of Indian Great Horned Owl (Bubo bubo) flying away from a Euphorbia caducifolia bush, on a hilly tract. The pair rested only 100 yards away and came back to its original haunt when I left that side and observed a tailor bird (Orthotomus sutorius). I also collected a land tortoise in addition to several rodents belonging to different species.

In addition to the birds listed above, the following were also met with: Brown Rock Chat (Cercomela fusca), House Crow (Corbus splendens), Brahminy or Blackheaded Myna (Sturnus pagodarum), Hoopoe (Upupa epops), House Sparrow (Passer domesticus), Shikra (Accipiter badius), Green Bittern (Butorides striatus), and the Brownheaded Gull (Larus brunnicephalus). The Blackbird (Turdus merula), the Painted Partridge (Francolinus pictus), and the Palm Swift (Cypsiurus parvus) have not been previously recorded by Hugh Whistler in his 'The Ornithological Survey of Jodhpur State', J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 40(2): 213-235; 1938

On the fifth day, I left Jawai dam with a contented feeling that even in the desert there is a good place for birdwatching

A TRIP TO SIKKIM

A. Mangalik

Through the courtesy of some friends, we were able to visit Sikkim during the middle of May 1969. My wife, our baby and myself were accompanied by Mrs Ganguli. I hope Mrs Ganguli will be able to find time to write up about her observations during this trip in the Newsletter. I have tried to persuade her and it may help if some members of the Society also ask her to do so.

The journey from Delhi to Sikkim is rather tedious. We chose to take the Rajdhani Express to Calcutta and a flight from there to Bagdogra. It is also possible to go via Lucknow and take the meter guage train from there to Siliguri. As a result of the floods of last October, the road from Siliguri to Gangtok is in a poor state of repairs and requires the journey to be made by vehicles equipped by 4-wheel drives. We were staying just outside the city towards the North Sikkim highway and the area was extremely rich in bird life. It is sparsely habited and has much variety of deciduous trees with occasional conifers. There is a lot of rain in Gangtok and this allows thick undergrowth. I was particularly interested in hiking and did not spend as much time as Mrs Ganguli for formal birdwatching. Without much effort, however, redrumped swallows, greenbacked tits and Pekin Robins (Leiothrix) were seen all round the house along with the tree sparrows, redvented bulbuls, stone chats and drongos, common crows and common Indian mynas. We also spotted an occasional spotted munia and heard the Khasi Hill and Plaintive cuckoos frequently. In the compound of the India House, we spotted Mrs Gould's Sunbird, Blackbreasted Sunbird, Yellownaped Yuhinas and Dark Grey Bushchat. Mrs Ganguli spent almost two hours every day in this area and picked up a number birds including some which were not supposed to be there and an occasional one she could not identify despite her best efforts. We made on trip to the Tashi viewpoint, about three miles up on the North Sikkim highway. From here, we got a wonderful view of the Kunchenchunga which was lucky, considering the generally cloudy weather. While walking around there, we saw Sikkim Striated Laughing Thrush and the Goldenthroated Barbet. On the same day we saw one black eagle flying high up in the air but were able to clearly see its yellow beak and its claws.

I went on a five-day hike into ~~the~~ North Sikkim going up to Yumthang at a height of 11,500 ft. One of the stops before Yumthang is Lachung at about 8000 feet. Here, I saw a large number of Greybacked shrikes. Their numbers were strikingly more in that area as compared to places before or after. During my journey from Lachung to Yumthang and back, I unfortunately did not have my binoculars nor my bird book with me but was able to see a large number of birds at fairly close quarters. The lack of the bird book prevented me from looking at some of the distinguishing features and this made positive identification of some birds a little difficult. For example, I saw a Whitecapped Redstart but failed to observe the presence or absence of the white patch on the wings. To me it appeared to be a white-capped black redstart which I had seen in Corbett Park. I saw most of these near the mountain streams. Also saw a large number of Himalayan Whistling Thrushes and a bird very similar in appearance but with a white patch near the neck and whose female was brownish in colour. This description was not sufficient for MrsGanguli to identify these birds and I was unable to spot them in Salim Ali's Birds of Sikkim. I saw a number of yellow beaked coughs but unfortunately did not carefully look at their legs, not realising the implications. I also saw four snowpigeons in Yumthang at different places, probably the same flock of birds. On the hill above, the Dak Bungalow in Yumthang, I also saw a fair number of redstarts. Near the river in Yumthang, I saw a dipper with a pale vent. Again unfortunately, I did not observe all its features to allow a positive identification of species.

My observations on the birds are unfortunately even sketchier

than my capabilities allow. I hope the write-up of Mrs Ganguli will help in placing these observations on a sound footing.

Sikkim is suffering because of the terrible tragedy of the Indo-Chinese conflict. Apart from its political and economic implications, the problems of flora and fauna posed by the massive build up of the Indian troops there are formidable. The places which were accessible only on foot till seven years ago now have troop concentrations of larger than a batallion strength with trucks, jeeps and Jongas plying on the roads in a continuous stream. The troops are posted on pickets on all altitudes and in almost all areas. All this will, if it has already not, affect the ecology of the area.

Apart from the natural beauty and birds of Sikkim, it is a most fascinating place to visit on account of its culture. The population is Nepalese in origin and largely Hindu but the Royal family is Budhist and since the imigrations from Tibet, a large number of Budhists have settled there. There is an Institute of Tibetology which has large numbers of old manuscripts from Tibet and is now conducting important studies on Tibetan culture and Budhist religion. Apart from the multitude of small Gumphas, there is a large Monastry at Rumtek. It is possible possible to stay at Rumtek and study the life there at close quarters. We were able to visit this for one day and also saw a programme of religious dances conducted on the occasion of Buddh Purnima. Entry into Gangtok is unrestricted for Indian citizens but unfortunately, hotel facilities are much limited. For travel beyond Gangtok, permits are required from the Sikkim police.

BEGINNER'S LUCK

S. K. Sen

I became aware of Natural History as a subject about 1962-63, while I was in England for study. Many books and films came out during that time and some films were also shown on television. The Bird Protection Society in England was particularly active and in many ways informed the public about these beautiful creatures. Some very beautiful films of birds came out about 1965.

Since then I had been toying with the idea of birdwatching but never could get a start until I came to work in Koraput in 1968.

Koraput district in Orissa has been the least known part of the State, until recently. This part of the state has always been looked on as ' Black Country '. Recently, due to some industry coming up, this part of the country has opened up. Koraput district in Orissa is probably one of the most beautiful part of the country.

Coming to work here, I came across two very beautiful birds, I have never seen before -- one is black and white striped (I named it Zebra bird!) and the other a little green bird with two long tail feathers. I also found that the birds here were relatively unafraid of human being, venturing nearer to them than the birds I have seen in towns. I made up my mind to take on bird spotting. My next problem was to find a suitable book.

On my tour to Bombay, I could find and acquire two very nice books on Indian birds - both by Salim Ali. Armed with these I was returning to Koraput and stopped for two days in Hyderabad. On 27.ii.1969 and 28.ii.1969 I stayed in Hindustan Aeronautics Guest House in Balanagar situated on the main road. Around there are plenty of open space and lands studded with tall palm trees and scrub bushes. The roadside was also studded with bushes and mole hills.

Since 28th February was a holiday and I had nothing much to do, I sat in the balcony facing west and the garden of the house and the road and beyond looking for spotting some birds! I was surprised to see so many!

There were about half a dozen common myna walking about condescendingly and chattering away and trying to find their food! I thought their brown and yellow and white on the wings on flight was perfectly

matched and their ways I thought were rather amusing.

There were also some ubiquitous sparrows flying about and chittering away. I could differentiate the male and female in sparrow but not in common myna.

Then I saw the ' Zebra birds ' of perfect shape and a floating sort of tail. I identified it from Salim Ali's book: Common Wagtail.

There were 4 or 5 Black Drongos sitting on the poles and small young trees, flying from one side to another. These birds I have seen so many times sitting on the telegraph wire while going in a train, but never knew their name before, nor that they are of three varieties! I have only seen the forked tailed Black Drongo.

Looking around I suddenly saw another few birds. They were drilling about the foot of the hedges of the garden and rather blended with the ground colour. Sort of dull pale brown. They looked hunched back! I identified them from Salim Ali's book as, common babbler. They really looked as if their tails were going to fall off!

Soon a small black bird came and sat on a pole. I could see its white rump and the white of the wing as it flew to settle on the pole. As it sat, the white of the wing completely disappeared. This I found was Bush Chat.

I got bored sitting and decided to take a walk into the factory town. For this one has to come on the main road, walk about a furlong and enter the gate of the township.

As I was walking round in the town I came across a tree, and heard twittering of birds. On looking up I found it was a peepal tree in fruit, and found quite a few birds. One was a bulbul, dark brown with a crest and red vent. I also saw a parakeet but could not identify it. Then I suddenly saw a beautiful yellow bird with a black head and part black wing. This was blackheaded oriole, no doubt.

On my way back, by the side of the main road I saw two black birds and a brown one pecking around a patch of mole colony, quite excited with their tails cocked up, showing the reddish brown rump. I stopped and watched for a while and came as close as three feet. This I identified later as Indian Robin, 2 males and one female. I also saw one small speckled brown, finch beak, munia-sized bird sitting on the roadside fence but could not identify it. It flew in spurts. Next time I see one of these, I think I would be able to identify.

As I walked along, I suddenly came across another big bird sitting on the roadside fence. This was bigger than a pigeon, brown with dull white head and breast. This was some kind of hawk, I knew from its beak. I identified it as shikra - I am not sure though. This bird made me look at the sky and I immediately identified one common kite and a brahminy kite.

As I was entering the guest house, I suddenly saw a very beautiful blue bird sitting on a long pole. For a minute I thought I was looking at a kingfisher, but there was no water near about. It took flight and Salim Ali's picture in his book came to my mind. I was seeing a blue jay or Indian roller.

Coming home, I thought I was rather lucky to see so many different birds in such a short time. It must have been a beginner's luck! Besides I saw all of them with naked eyes and knew I must buy a pair of Binoculars!

PEAFOWL LAYS EGGS IN A VULTURE'S NEST

V. S. Saxena

Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary is famous both for breeding of indigenous birds and for settling of migratory birds in its shallow waters, overgrown with aquatic flora. The sanctuary besides supporting about 250 species of birds, abounds in Peafowl (Pavo cristatus Linn.). On 19.viii.1969 while observing the birds like white ibis, openbilled stork, painted stork, cormorant, cattle-, little-, and median egrets,

snake bird or darter nesting on babul trees, I came across a Little Grebe or Dabchick sitting in a nest made of grass and leaves on water surface, on eggs numbering 8 (light brown in colour). The boat was rolling on gradually and came close to a huge kadam (Mitragyna parvifolia) tree, growing in knee-deep water, and suddenly our attention was distracted by the sudden flight of a peafowl from a nest on this tree. Curiosity arose, because the normal nesting of peafowl in this area is roofs of the houses and a hollow scraped in the ground, more or less filled with leaves and other debris. On climbing the tree, it was seen that the nest is an old one of the White-backed Vulture (Pseudogyps bengalensis) on the lowermost branching point of the trunk of the tree. The nest is apparently concealed by thick foliage of the tree. Some soft cushioning effect of grass leaves was provided in this huge nest and the clutch consisted of six eggs of the size of a painted stork's. These are of pale fawn colour. A watch is being kept over hatching of the eggs. The tree above has old nestsof vultures, but so far this year, none of them have laid eggs in them. Intending visitor to the sanctuary would be interested to look for it. This tree is just behind the Shanti Kutir Forest Rest House, close to the steps of Boating House.

There was another interesting observation of a Sirkeer cuckos (Taccocua leschenaultii) in Mandera (19 miles northwest of Bharatpur town) on 17.viii.1969 in the evening about 5 p.m. Mandera supports scrub jungle and this solitary bird wasperching on the branches of ber (Zizyphus mauratiana) tree. The outer tail-feathers were black with broad white tips. The curved and hooked cherry-red bill with yellow at the tip was very striking. This bird does not seem to have been reported earlier from here. I wonder, if it is a new record, although Mandera falls with the zone of its occurrence.

A HERONRY OF PURPLE HERONS IN THE SALT LAKE, NEAR CALCUTTA

S. S. SAHA

In the course of an usual round up at weekend in the swamps of North Salt Lake in the eastern fringe of Calcutta, I came across a heronry of Purple Herons (Ardea purpurea) on 2nd August 1966.

More than 30 pairs were busy in the care of their nests and eggs in a thick bed of reeds (Phragmites karaka). Nests were built on platforms of stems of reeds and were firmly fixed in position with the support of several live reeds bent together. And they were situated so close to each other that some were within a metre distance from one another. Nests were held about ninety centimetres off from the water surface. They were wholly made up of dried reed stems without any sort of lining. The reeds were arranged criss-crossed but cleverly and firmly enough to stand the weight of the alighting birds. Occasionally the builders used to add new stems or rearrange the reeds here and there. Size of a nest was 30 to 40 cm in diameter, with a shallow central cup of 5 cm depth, while thickness varied from 15 to 30 cm in places. A few sticks were projecting out in places.

Clutch size varied from 3 to 4, but mostly 3 was the average size. Eggs were oval in shape but some were almost ellipsoidal. They were coloured plain greenish blue, faded slightly with maturity. In some eggs irregular white patches of lime were marked but those could be chipped off. Due to absence of linings in the nests, the eggs were subject to pricks from the reed stem ends and therefore scratch marks were invariably present on them. Two eggs measured: 54 x 39.7 mm and 53.4 x 39 mm. Eggs were seen hatching out after 20 days of laying. An egg laid on 2 August was breaking up on 21 August 1966. On that day a hole of c. 1 cm diamter was marked through which the moving young could be seen, while most of the eggs of the colony had the breaks. Fledglings, almost in all nests were found in the next week.

The parents were found to be busy collecting food for the every hungry young. While approaching towards the colony, a continuous guttural noise was heard from the various young. The colony was very much foul in smell with the faeces and of the young. During the month of October young were found independently feeding.

This colony site waspreviously the roosting place for the Purple Moorhens and Indian Moorhens, which were probably driven out. Earlier the Purple Herons were roosting in a widespread reed patch nearby, scattered singly or in pairs. From about the month of July or so they got interested in this place occupied by the moorhens, and their occasional trespass in the territory perhaps scared the original inhabitants away from the roosting place.

BAY BANDED CUCKOO

K. N. Nair

During the middle of June 1965, I saw a Bay Banded Cuckoo in our compound at Mavilayi (Cananore dist). It was my first bird. I could watch the bird at close quarters continuously for two or three days. Since Dr Salim Ali's Birds of Travancore and Cochin was with me then, I could identify the bird. As I was very careful not to mistake this bird with the Plaintive Cuckoo, I do not think that I could have gone wrong in my identification.

From a perusal of the literature available to me, I could see that the bird though rare in Travancore is very common in the forests of Malabar. There is no mention about this bird in the other books of Dr Salim Ali, i.e. The Book of Indian Birds and Indian Hill Birds. Keralathile Pakshikal by Sri K. K. Neelakantan is also silent about this bird.

I write this because in a recent edition of Birds of Kerala by Dr Salim Ali also the bird is described as rare with records only for March and April. This may be correct as far as the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin is concerned. But I feel that the bird can be seen without difficulty in Malabar area even after March and April. I invite comments from other birdwatchers of Malabar on this.

' BIRDS THE ANGLER YEARNS FOR

Signod Clare Dover. Reproduced from The Daily Telegraph, London, 11 August 1969

Steps are being taken to put an end to a feather smuggling racket which is threatening with extinction the grey junglefowl, Gallus sonneratii, an Indian bird of the pheasant family. The neck feathers of the cock bird are highly prized by fishermen as the final decoration in several salmon and sea trout flies.

They are particularly beautiful feathers which are arranged in pairs so that a spot on each feather gives the impression of a pair of eyes.

Following requests from the International Council for Bird Preservation, the Board of Trade is now tightening up on the feathers allowed into Britain. In 1967, Indian conservationists reached the conclusion that the survival of the species was being endangered, and the Indian Government banned the export of the skins and the capes -- neck skins with the feathers attached.

A spokesman for the Board of Trade told me: " As from now, the importers will have to prove that any feathers being brought into this country were exported from India before the ban. Otherwise they will not be allowed in. "

India has previously allowed the export of jungle cock capes under a quota system. The United Kingdom allowed 4250 capes a year; America 5000.

The manufacturers of fishing flies, who do most of their trade in exports to the United States and Canada, are far from happy about the ban.

"We don't accept that the jungle cock is becoming extinct, " one manufacturer told me. " This will mean the death of two very famous salmon flies, the Jock Scott and Thunder and Lightning. The Dunkeld, a sea trout fly, will also disappear. A lot of feathers are interchangeable. But there is nothing anywhere like the jungle cock feather. They look as though they are made of wax. No decent fisherman would use a plastic imitation. "

I spoke to one person who had returned from India after spending 30 years shooting the grey junglefowl in the hilly tea planting areas of central India. " The bird is far from extinct, " he told me. " There are lashings of jungle cocks. No trouble in catching them at all. "

Smuggler's tale

The International Council for Bird Preservation disagrees with the notion that there are still plenty of the birds to be found. The story of the grey junglefowl is told in the President's letter to council members. " Under normal circumstances, " it says, " the protection afforded to it by the Wild Animals and Birds Protection Act of 1902 would have been adequate, since under the Act no wild bird feathers or skins can be exported from India except for scientific purposes and only to recognised scientific institutions. " The story then turns into a smuggler's tale.

" Owing to the lucrative prices obtainable for the capes in the U.S.A., smuggling on a large scale soon became rampant. Unscrupulous businessmen hired gangs of jungle people to snare or kill jungle cocks and turn the skins in for a pittance, and smuggled these out of the country by pareel post under a false declaration of the contents as ' Sample of no Commercial Value. '

" The skins or capes were first smuggled across the land frontier into Nepal or Pakistan or Portuguese Goa, whence they would be freely exported without contravening the local Customs regulations.

" There was no limit to what could be exported from Nepal, Pakistan or Goa. This upward trend poses a serious threat to the species since in wild populations it cannot stand the growing pressure indefinitely. The evil effects are already apparent in certain districts where the numbers have been markedly reduced. "

Fly manufacturers corroborate the smuggling story. One told me that some of the illicit capes were finding their way to England. " We were offered some of the capes recently, " he said, " but they were smuggled and we didn't touch them. We stick to our legal quotas."

The London Zoo has six grey junglefowl in its pheasantry. These birds have bred ' satisfactorily ' captivity. " We feed them on commercial poultry pellets, " a spokesman said. Nevertheless, experts on the grey junglefowl say that the bird does not breed sufficiently well in captivity to make it worthwhile establishing commercial pheasantries for the fishing trade. '

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Outing to the Borivili National Park

On Sunday, 21st September we had the first outing of the season at the Borivili National Park. We had planned to break up into several small groups to explore out areas to make up the list of trees, butterflies, birds and other forms of life. Unfortunately, this desirable plan remained on paper and nothing serious was done. However the participants had an enjoyable morning, and we congregated for lunch at the Tourist Lodge overlooking Tulsi Lake which has just been built by the Forest Department. It is an extraordinarily beautiful area with a splendid view of the forested islands in the middle of the lake.

The Editor also saw a blue bull near the Vihar Lake. As readers may recall a few months ago four blue bull were released in the Park with some Barking Deer and four Fourhorned Antelope. The animal seemed to be in good condition and it is to be hoped that the entire flock survives and will multiply in due course of time.

The Green Bee-eater arrives in Bombay

As I write this I hear the first sounds of the Common Green Bee-eaters in my garden this season (27 Sept. 1969). For the last 15 years at least I have seen a flock go away from here in May and return in September. It is cheering to see that they are not deterred by the increased urbanization around our garden.

CORRESPONDENCE

Bombay arrivals

During two consecutive week-ends at Marve, Bombay, I was delighted to see the following birds:

Eastern Golden Plover (Pluvialis dominica) - 29th August
Hoopoe (Upupa epops) - 30 August
Blackwinged Stilt (Himantopus himantopus) - 6 September
Reef Heron (Egretta gularis) - 7 September

I watched the Eastern Golden Plover most carefully on two successive days and noted the absence of white wing-bar and their smoky grey underwings and axillaries. The birds were in warm summer dress and were on grassy land near tidal mudflats.

The Hoopoe was a stray bird that I studied for a few minutes just outside the garden. I was unable to locate any further hoopoe in spite of paying several visits to what were favourite haunts of this last winter.

6 Blackwinged stilts were seen by me at Marve and 23 at Mahim cesspool the following day, 7 September. I do wish such attractive birds would not choose unsalubrious surroundings in the Mahim area!

The Reef Heron was of the slaty phase and in an old and favoured position on sand in front of rocks, moving in and out with the waves.

[illegible] and

D. A. Stairmand
c/o Mercantile Bank
Bombay

[illegible]

' Birds of Barh ' - Purple Sunbird

Commenting on my article ' Birds of Barh ' in the May 1969 issue Mr R. L. Fleming observed in August 1969 Newsletter that Purple Sunbirds of Bihar migrate to Nepal in May and stay there for at least five months.

Though I have not kept an accurate record of these birds I am sure that many Purple Sunbirds are seen here in non-breeding plumage in the months of August and September. On 14th September I also observed two males in non-breeding plumage on a jamun tree. It may be possible that Purple Sunbirds of Bihar migrate to Nepal between May and October and they are replaced by birds from south India. This can only be verified by ringing them. Inland migrations of birds are still very much unknown and the Bombay Natural History Society should make arrangements for ringing the resident birds.

Kameshwar Pd Singh
Lecturer, A.N.S. College
P. O. Barh, Dist Patna

' Birds of Singhbhum '

I was a bit surprised to read your footnote to Mrs Jamal Ara's article on the birds of Singhbhum.

I have seen the Goldmantled Chloropses (Chloropsis cochinchinensis) twice in Jamalpur in May 1968. On the first occasion I saw a male and two females on a sal tree. I confirmed their identity by climbing to within ten feet of them on a nearby tree. The purplish and bluish marks near their beaks could be seen, quite easily at that range.

A fortnight later while trying to locate a non-existent drongo on a large banyan tree, I found that the calls were actually those of a chlropses. As the bird was high up I cannot say for sure that it was a goldmantled chloropsis. At that time I assumed it was one.

However there may have been stray birds. I have not seen a chloropses in Jamalpur since.

Debashis Ray
Jamalpur, Bihar

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BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF INDIA

32-A Juhu Lane
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Phone: 571279

November 20, 1969

N O T I C E

The Ninth Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India will be held on Saturday, the 20th December 1969, at 5 p.m., at the residence of the Honorary Secretary, at 32-A Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58, when you are requested to be present.

A g e n d a

1. To elect a Chairman of the meeting;
2. to confirm the minutes of the last annual general meeting;
3. to get a report from the Honorary Secretary about the general working of the Club during the past year, and of the accounts;
4. to elect members of the Editorial Board for the Newsletter, and Regional Representatives for the Club;
5. any other business that may be brought forward with the permision of the Chairman.

It will be appreciated if those who intend to come inform the Honorary Secretary in advance either by telephone 571279 or by letter.

Zafar Futehally
Honorary Secretary
Birdwatchers Field Club of India

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 9–No. 11–1969 November



NEWSLETTER FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 9, Number 11 November 1969

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STRAY OBSERVATIONS

M. K. Himmatsinhji

The study of birds or ornithology, as it is called, is (apart from being very interesting and a useful pastime) like all other branches of science, very exacting for those who take it up seriously. However the great advantage is watching birds and studying their habits is that even laymen or amateurs could also take a useful part and while developing it as a good hobby can at the same time make important contributions to the knowledge of these very interesting forms of life. There are many aspects of bird behaviour which still remain unknown or unexplained. Taking the example of the birds in our own country, so little is known about the life-history of most of the birds resident in India. It is in this field that our knowledge could be augmented even by the casual birdwatcher if he or she can take up the systematic study of just one bird at a time.

All this sounds very simple, and it really is not difficult, provided one adheres to certain basic rules. For instance the most common tendency in people is to attribute human feelings and emotions to animal behaviour. This of course has to be avoided, for the basic fact to remember when dealing with animals is that they are guided in their actions almost entirely by experience and an inherent sense of instinct. Once this is realized the chances for going astray in interpreting their behaviour are minimized to a great extent.

Identifying birds in the field is also an aspect, though not too difficult, which cannot be taken lightly. With a certain amount of familiarity with the various species or orders along with their characteristics one can easily pinpoint a bird. Here again a consistent systematic study of behaviour, habitat, salient features of birds of different types, their plumage, coloration and so forth have to be taken note of. All this can easily be learnt and cultivated by practice and constant observations or references to relevant literature available with one. In this field of bird study also it is most important not to let ones imagination lead one astray. Nothing should be left to memory even for a short time. The best thing to do is to keep a small notebook and pencil handy in ones pocket when out watching our feathered friends. It does not pay in the long run to watch a new bird and then after going home writing the details from memory about its coloration, call notes, type of country in which seen, etc. Worse

still if one asks an expert after such an observation to reveal the identity of the bird so described, it is more often than not next to impossible for the ornithologist to help anyone in the matter. More serious observers could shoot a bird and thus collect a specimen provided he knows how to preserve it. Those who are fond of photography could shoot birds with their cameras; or making an on-the-spot rough sketch in ones notebook of the bird seen can be of help in identifying the bird.

Typing the above paragraph reminds me that up to the August issue of the Newsletter the bird described by Dr G. C. De (Vol. 9, No. 5 - May 1969) has not been named by anyone as yet. From the description given it was possibly the Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher. I may mention here that any flycatcher that spreads out its tail is not necessarily a fantail flycatcher. Some more information, such as the type of environment, call notes heard or not, whether the bird remained in the same bush or tree for long or kept on flying from one tree to another at short intervals, whether it indulged in frequent sallies after insects and so on, would have helped a great deal in identifying it more accurately. More often than not, it is better to give just a general description of a bird along with its prominent markings rather than go into greater details about its coloration.

This brings to mind my own experiences over identifying new birds. I was out birdwatching at a small tank in May 1948 (if my memory does not fail me as regards the year, since I do not have my notes with me here). The tank was practically dry except for a small stretch of water in which I at once noticed a new and strange bird swimming all the time; and while I watched it I never even once saw it leave the water to rest. I did not have a notebook with me, but on reaching home I immediately wrote down the description of the wader. But the very first words I put down in describing my new find were that I saw a crake-like bird. Then of course I put down the salient colour markings, the shape of its bill and its colour, etc. all from my memory. Then of course followed the usual practice of going through a all the books I had with me without meeting with any success in establishing the identity of the wader concerned. After this I was just thumbing through the pages of the paperback Bird Recognition by James Fisher when I accidentally fell upon the picture of the new bird I had seen. On going through the description given in the book I found it fitted perfectly with what I had noted down myself. As an illustration of what is mentioned earlier, this was a typical case of how a wrong impression created through ones imagination could lead one astray in identifying a bird. By letting myself believe on going home that I had seen a bird which looked like a crake I inadvertantly brought myself to a dead end so far as establishing the identity of that wader was concerned! This particular bird was the Rednecked Phalarope (Phalaropus lobatus). It was I think a female in full summer plumage, so that extent it became easy for me to identify it.

The changes in nomenclature (scientific names) of birds must also cause some difficulties and confusion in the minds of birdwatchers in this country, though this problem is minimized by the recent publication of Ripley's Synopsis and would be completely remedied in the not too distant future when the new Handbook series are completed. What we really need now, with an increasing number of people taking interest in our birdlife, is a book on the same lines as the Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe by Peterson, Montfort and Hollom. Even if a book of that type cannot be published covering the birdlife of the whole country, it would be a great achievement if a beginning is made for one or two regions of India. The emphasis in such a work would be more on pictures and less on descriptive passages; but it is the cost of such a profusely illustrated book which in our country becomes almost prohibitive.

Amongst us in this country there are so many curious and fallacious notions regarding the habits and the biology of birds that one can write volumes on them. However, the point I want to make is that erroneous ideas about birdlife are not just confined to village or country folks; some enlightened bird enthusiasts also labour under wrong impressions. One glaring instance of this is the belief about

the roosting habits of the Grey Partridge. It is a matter of elementary knowledge that most gallinaceous birds are known to roost at night on bushes and large trees, where they available for this purpose. It is only during the day that they spend their time on the ground, feeding, dust-bathing, and so on. A departure is made from this practice merely by the hens which incubate eggs and have chicks that cannot fly. But as soon as the chicks grow their flight feathers and are able to fly, the mother takes them up a tree or the tallest bush to spend the night in. The Grey Partridges somehow generally choose the thorniest tree or bush as a resting place and the whole covey, including the young ones, spend the night together. They generally prefer to roost in the same place and it is most interesting to watch them gradually making their way towards the favourite roosting site as dusk approaches. I have seen different coveys do this on several occasions. One covey liked a particular babul tree (Acacia arabica) and there was a second one which spent their nights on a particular coconut tree in the shelter of the fronds. Thus, partridges do not spend the night huddled together under a bush, as some people think. Those who keep domestic hens must have noticed that even these prefer to roost on the highest place available in their enclosure. Birds such as sandgrouse, plovers, coursers, cranes and some other ground-feeding species of course spend their nights on the ground, but then they live in quite different environments to those which partridges, junglefowl, etc. prefer.

Similarly an impression goes round that the call of the Grey Partridge commonly heard is uttered by the male or the cock bird only. In actual fact what one usually hears are the combined calls of both sexes. The female's contribution is merely a sharp teee, teee, teee... which as a rule blends perfectly with the call of the opposite sex, and that is why it sounds like the call of one bird only. This statement can easily be verified if one listens carefully to the calls of a tame pair of partridges in a cage.

Very few people may be aware of the hardiness of certain species of birds which live in arid regions. To cite the example of Grey Partridge once again, they can live without water for months on end. The only time they can drink water is for a few months after the rains, the rest of the year there is no water to be found anywhere within a radius of hundred of square miles and the birds have to subsist on whatever little moisture they can get out of eating the leaves of certain desert plantlife and the insects they consume. And this applies to other bird species such as larks, babblers, etc. too. I conducted certain experiments with the partridges I used to keep some years ago. In this for a period of three months at a stretch I gave no water but only limited quantities of green leaves once a day, pellets of wheat flour made after mixing a tablespoon of water twice a day and I used to allow my partridges to eat termites twice or thrice a week, and they were none the worse for it. This experiment was tried out on three birds.

What I have stated in the above paragraphs is just like a drop in the vast ocean of bird study which needs to be explored in our country and even small or limited attempts in this field would be of help to those who take interest in the subject by widening their knowledge about the natural phenomena which goes on all around us. And lastly, I must not fail to mention that what we need badly today is a book devoted entirely to giving hints to beginners as well as serious students as to the proper method for watching and studying birds. Many such books have been published in foreign countries, but they are not entirely suited for our conditions. Dr Salim Ali (The Book of Indian Birds) has given many useful hints on this subject, even so there is much that still remains to be done in this direction, and hence I have no doubt in my mind that bird lovers all over the country would welcome a comprehensive but cheap work of this nature.

I did not think when I started, that these stray observations would run into so many words. It is likely that I have erred in some ways, but I am always ready to correct my mistakes. Anyway readers of the Newsletter may please note that I have been careful not to call them ' Stray Thoughts ' !

THE OPENBILLED STORK (ANASTOMUS OSCITANS) AND THE BLACKWINGED STILT (HIMANTOPUS HIMANTOPUS) IN BOMBAY

D. A. Stairmand

I was at Vihar Lake on 15 December, 1968 and one of the places of great interest to me there was the small islet on the Lake which invariably had a fairly large congregation of Little Cormorants augmented by some darters, grey herons, various egrets and a few Redwattled lapwings. On that day the usual interesting collection of birds was supplemented by the appearance of two Openbilled Storks (Anastomus oscitans). These interested me particularly as ' The Birds of Bombay and Salsette ' by Salim Ali and Humayun Abdulali states ' Local migrant. Rare. ' Admittedly, Volume 1 of the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley indicates a very elastic distribution but nevertheless I was delighted to see the Openbills at Vihar. On subsequent visits to Vihar I saw Openbills, never more than five, in the months of January and February 1969. The last time in February was the very last day of the month. I cant say that the Openbills were exciting to watch as they just stood near the water's edge and the odd one would walk a few yards occasionally but they were decorative. They roosted in the tall trees on the islet but flew away from these just after dawn into the unseen distance. It was during the middle of the day that they could be seen standing around almost motionless.

Due to sustained interest in birdwatching at Karnala Fort and Khandala, I regretfully neglected Vihar Lake from the very end of February until 17 May, 1969, when on my return visit to the Lake I found that there were 15 Openbilled Storks standing in a group on the islet. Two weeks later I noted 14. A rather odd thing occurred on 15th June. I had my binoculars focused on the islet at dawn and a large number of Little Cormorants and white egrets flew out to fill their stomachs. I did not notice any Openbills amongst their numbers but these birds appeared from the foliage of the trees about 15 minutes after sunrise and stood in the tree-tops mainly spreading out their wings, as if in some sort of ' display ' and tugging at twigs. Five birds broke away from the group after an hour or so but merely to stand in the top of an adjacent tree. I watched these birds for over 4 hours, to 10 a.m. or so and the birds during that time did not fly out to eat at all. This seemed strange at the time and is still a mystery to me. For some inexplicable reason I did not note the exact number of birds that day, but am inclined to think there were about 14.

This saga of the Openbills at Vihar ends with the week-end of 5th/6th July. On the afternoon of the 5th I spend some 2½ hours wandering around Vihar, during which time I was soaked to the skin three times by heavy showers, without seeing an Openbill. It was a miserable afternoon and I was drenched when a tiny patch of blue sky revealed an old lost friend, the sun! I thought, ' how nice, a piece of blue sky, and a little bit of sunshine ... '. And across that piece of blue sky flew two lovely white birds with black in their wings and necks outstretched. The Openbills! They flew to the islet and were shortly joined in the tree-tops there by another Openbill and a Grey Heron. Next morning five Openbills emerged from the tree-tops at dawn and flew out, presumably to feed.

On my next visit on the 19th of July the islet was deserted except for a few crows and kites. The birds had flown.

At no time had the Openbills, cormorants, herons,egrets, etc. shown any true signs of nesting activities at the islet. I should mention that some 3-4 of the Openbills appeared to be immature birds with greyish coloration.

Vihar is such a pleasant place for birdwatching that it is most distressing to hear and see all the illegal tree felling going on

quite blatantly. Also many of the lovely old trees such as Banyan (Ficus bengalensis), and mango (Mangifera indica) are being burnt out at the base of their trunks, thus murdering them. I earnestly plead for some one with the voice of Authority to make a suitable protest about this. At the moment there does not appear to be any check on this illegal woodcutting. Also much fishing goes on. Tulsi is better as far as tree-felling is concerned.

On my visits to Vihar, I often took a route that goes past the Tidal Creek-cum-rubbish dump (if nothing worse!) at Mahim. There I saw Blackwinged Stilts (Himantopus himantopus) on several occasions between 5th January and 28th February 1969. ' Local migrant? All our records are between 29th September and 6th November only,* not uncommon but patchy ' so says ' The Birds of Bombay and Salsette ' by Salim Ali and Humayun Abdulali. The West Coast of India is left curiously bare in Volume 2 of the Handbook by Salim Ali and Ripley in the map showing the ' Distributional range ' of Himantopus himantopus. At Mahim on 5th January I counted 45 Stilts; on the 12th January about 100. On 9th February only 9.

On 28th February 1969, I made it 351 Blackwinged Stilts at high noon. I was pleased, I can tell you.

/*Mr Stairmand appears to have overlooked additions to the Birds of Bombay and Salsette in the J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. published from time to time by Dr Salim Ali and Mr Humayun Abdulali, either jointly and/or severally. One such addition is in Vol. 49: 789-91 of the Journal for 1951, recording the breeding of the Blackwinged Stilt from Powai Lake, Bombay, in 1950, by Mr Abdulali. In mid June that year, Mr Humayun Abdulali flushed an incubating bird off a clutch of 4 eggs on one of the islands thrown up in the Lake by falling water level. When the place was revisited on 23/vi, there were two chicks moving about the island and a third egg was on the point of hatching. Among other details in the note Mr Abdulali records that prior to this he had seen the birds in April and May 1944 and again a restive flock of 40-50 individuals on 9th June 1947 in the Mahim Creek. -- Ed./

SOME NILGIRI BIRDS

Sarah Jameson

I must confess I sighed deeply when I received a request from our Editor to write about the birds here, but having started the task, I find I am really very grateful to him, as I am at least being forced to put my notes into some sort of order. I only wish I were better qualified to write this. Alas I am only able to spend the odd months in Coonoor, and unfortunately am never able to devote much time to birdwatching.

The names of the birds I have actually seen (or heard) are in block capitals. Those birds which I have not yet seen but which are to be found in and around Coonoor, are underlined. The other birds mentioned are met with at lower altitudes in the Nilgiris. In compiling this list I could not have done without Salim Ali's Indian Hill Birds.

I shall start with the REDWHISKERED BULBULS which are perhaps the most common birds in our garden. Never a day passes without my hearing or seeing one. They are attractive sprightly birds, with their forward pointing black crests, blackish broken ' necklace ' and crimson ' whiskers '. Below the whisker is a halfmoon of white, bordered by what might be black ' eyeliner '! The patch under the root of the tail is invariably a much lighter shade, more flame than crimson. I once saw an adult without the whiskers! Most of their calls are melodious and cheerful, some of them similar to those of the Redvented Bulbuls, which are found lower down the hill. I am very familiar with the Redvented as our compound in Disergarh, West Bengal, is full of them. I once counted 14! Since May 18th, a Redwhiskered has been sitting on a nest built in the ceiling of our porch between two beams. There is no greenery near it. A friend of ours also has a bulbul's nest in her porch but

it is built among creepers and is much lower. The nest here is about 13 feet from the ground, which appears to be unusually high, as Whistler writes that their nests are ' place in bushes at heights below 6 feet '. On a few occasions I have heard the bird calling from inside the nest, and also when sitting on a wire near it. It seems odd to draw attention to the nest. They do not appear to mind the comings and goings of cars and people just below them. One of the pair has the thickest necklace I have ever seen and is only JUST broken. Necklaces all vary in thickness and some are little more than a line. Perhaps the necklace thickens as the bird gets older?

The BLACK BULBUIS are not quite so common, but I see them fairly often, mostly in small parties. They are very dull coloured.

I have not managed to see the bird, but have sometimes heard a call of three clear loud mellow whistles -- sometimes the middle note is missed out -- rather like a mournful ' wolf whistle '. I think this must be the YELLOWBROWED BULBUL.

Almost daily I hear if not see, the ASHY WREN-WARBIER. This is quite an attractive small bird, dark ashy above and pale buff below, with a longish tail. The commonest call note is a loud and urgent tee tee tee etc. Its voice always reminds me of the Tailor Bird's.

A few times I have seen a small bird which I am sure is TICKELL'S WILLOW WARBIER.*It is olive-brown above, has bright yellow underparts and eyebrows, no wing bar. The Large-crowned and Greenish Willow-Warblers I think are both found up here.**

Very occasionally I have seen a tiny bird flying high overhead in an erratic dipping, rather drunken manner, every second or so uttering a loud snip exactly the sound made by a pair of big scissors. This is the STREAKED FANTAIL-WARBLER.

At times I have noticed small parties of birds flying fast along the hillsides. Once I identified them as NILGIRI HOUSE-SWALLOWS, and the other times they have been one of the SWIFTS uttering loud excited chee chees.

/*William Davison, one of Hume's curators, who spent 19 of his young years in the Nilgiris writes about this bird (Stray Feathers 10: 394 et seq., 1883) thus: ' . . . The land in the vicinity of Ootacamund, Coonoor, Kotagherry, etc. is cultivated in a very crude sort of way by a tribe of hill people called Badagas, and in and about the cultivated land are patches of land lying fallow and sparsely covered with brushwood. Parties of this Phylloscopus assemble together (I have seen twenty or thirty together), and feed about on the ground, acting to a certain extent independently of one another. When disturbed they scatter and take refuge in the bushes, but when all is quiet, they drop one by one to the ground, and soon all re-assemble. They are of course commonly found wandering about singly or in small parties, and even then feed much on the ground; from what I have observed, I should say, far more than they do in trees and bushes. They are a familiar little bird, and are fond of frequenting gardens, when they hunt about among the flowers or vegetable beds, destroying a great number of insects ' In the 80 and odd years since Davison wrote the above the face of the country must have changed immensely, and one may not be able to see such assemblies of Tickell's Willow-Warbler which Davison referred to in his day. -- Ed.

**We are not aware of the occurrence of the Large Crowned Willow Warbler in the Nilgiris, but the Greenish Willow-Warbler is common in winter, arriving as early as 18th September (earliest specimen by Davison) and staying as late as early April (latest specimen on 5/iv). In addition to the Greenish, Davison shot a male of Brooks's or Tytler's Willow-Warbler (Phylloscopus tytleri) at Ootacamund on 10 March 1881, and another of the same on 22 January 1882 or 1883. -- Ed./

GREY TITS are among the most attractive birds seen in this garden, usually climbing about the foliage in an acrobatic manner. They have a number of pleasing calls, among them one of 3, sometimes 4, notes in descending scale, repeated very quickly 3 times. I have also fre-

quently heard them utter a plaintive high-pitched, long-drawn-out trrrrrr. In the breeding season (Feb. to June) the call is a loud rather sweet-toned wheechee wheechee etc.; I heard this very often all through April, but only once since the beginning of May.

I have once seen the very pretty YELLOWCHEEKED TIT, in July.

HOOPOES are very striking birds and it is not surprising they have attracted attention down through the ages in various lands. The birds I have seen in Disergarh (not often however) are very faded looking in comparison with the more richly coloured birds of the southern race. In those seen here, there has been no white at all in the longer feathers of the crown, between black and fawn. I have sometimes noticed a smudge of fawn on one or two of the white bands. They are remarkably tame birds -- this morning (22/v) one moved most reluctantly out of the way of my car, and continued walking quite unconcernedly barely 8 feet away. I have often been able to approach quite close to them on the ground, and incredible though it may seem, I almost trod on one the other day! I had been working quietly at a flower bed, and suddenly stepped back, to see a very alarmed hoopoe burst from near my feet. Early in May, a pair were contemplating building a nest in a hole in the wall under the eaves near my bedroom window, and I was rather relieved when they decided to go off elsewhere, as I would not have relished the smell! My attention was drawn to them when I heard peculiar harsh hissing churring noises and also a sort of nasal oon, not unlike a monkey's call, but none of the usual hoo-poo-poo calls. One day I watched two hoopoes on the ground. They were probing in the grass with their long bills, making curious little squeaky noises, and the oon sound referred to, very very softly. Twice they walked towards each other with their bills open till they met. This display ended each time in a squeaky hissing sound. I do not know the reason for this behaviour. I have several times heard a high-pitched loud sibilant squeaking, at the rate of about one squeak per second, sometimes faster, sometimes slower, and have at last discovered that the sound is made by a hoopoe. I established without doubt that it was a hoopoe as I saw the bird very close and clearly saw its bill opening as the sound was made. I have not seen this call recorded in any of the books I have read.

Another familiar bird here is the PIED BUSH-CHAT. He is a small black and white bird, and his sober brown wife with rufous patch at base of tail is never very far away. They both love to sit on vantage points, flying down to the ground to pick up morsels. The song is varied and quite sweet. It also has a rather hard chek, chek and a somewhat sad what sad short single whistle. It is too high here for the Indian Blue-Chat and the Collared Bush-Chat.

I have sometimes seen the BROWN SHRIKE, usually sitting motionless on a telegraph wire, even as late as the middle of April. Those I have seen here and also those seen in Disergarh during winter, have all been very finely barred across breast and flanks. One day I saw it sitting in the Cherry tree outside my bedroom here. It was singing a funny little subdued whispery chattery song song. I have heard the same thing once in Disergarh. The Rufousbacked Shrike is found in the Nilgiris at lower elevations.

The best songster in the garden is the MAGPIE-ROBIN, and this must be about the height limit for them as our house is roughly 5950 feet above sea level. I see the male and his wife every now and then, and hear odd snatches of song. The breeding season is said to be from the end of March till the end of July. I am disappointed that the male does not sing more often, perhaps April and May are not the right months for this particular one, or perhaps they just do not sing as much as in the plains — certainly there has been nothing like the glorious torrent of song that fills our Disergarh garden in spring.

I have not seen either the Spotted or Quaker Babblers, but have several times come across noisy squeaky parties of JUNGLE BABBLERS.

I have found that the COMMON MYNA is anything but common here, and in fact have very seldom seen one. The JUNGLE MYNA is about quite often, with the rather odd very pale blue eyes of the southern race. I once saw two of them walking on the lawn. They were the same size, but were

presumably parent and child, as one kept popping morsels into the ever open bill of the other. Last June I saw a very curious sight. There were six Jungle Mynas on the grass, one was lying almost on its side, and three were sitting as though they had no legs, and all had their bills wide open. After about a minute they all flew off. I wonder what is the cause of this peculiar behaviour?

The HOUSE-SPARROW is a very familiar bird here as elsewhere, and is seen and heard daily. There is a nest just now in the east wall of the house under the eaves.

I usually see the WHITE-EYES in small parties busily hunting through the foliage, but once counted about 20 in a small tree. These quaint little birds are greenish yellow above, greyish white below, with a very conspicuous white ring round the eyes. They never seem to be quiet, and give away their presence by a constantly uttered rather soft chee chee which call nevertheless produces a considerable volume of sound when uttered by a party of these birds.

Last November I saw the EASTERN GREY-WAGTAIL several times, either on the roof or the ground. It has pretty colouring, in winter grey upperparts, brown wings, black tail, dull white eyebrows and yellow lower plumage. The long tail is constantly wagged up and down as with all wagtails — I wonder why? I have not yet seen the Large Pied Wagtail, but I suppose it would only be found near water.

One March I saw some ROSEFINCHES in a tree.

Rather similar at first sight to the Common Myna is the SOUTHERN BLACKBIRD. I have rarely seen them however. Their song in the breeding season is very rich and beautiful.

We once saw a male ORANGE MINIVET in a forested area just a few miles from the town. This is a beautiful and striking bird with its colour scheme of glossy black and orange.

I have just seen a bird on the ground for a few moments, which I have not yet identified. About the size and shape of a Magpie-Robin with its tail held up in the same manner, but not so long. The whole bird a uniform brown except for the breast which was whitish very heavily streaked with dark. Dark eyes, bill and legs.

I have not seen or heard the Longtailed or Jungle Nightjars though I think they come up as high as Coonoor.

(To be continued)

PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA IN KERALA

K. K. Neelakantan

Sri K. N. Nair's note on this subject in the September 1969 issue of the Newsletter made me run up to Kanhangad on 21/ix. The weed-filled pools mentioned by Sri Nair were easily found and so were numerous Pheasant-tailed Jacanas in breeding plumage. All but one had long sickle-shaped tails. The single exception had the same colours as the others. The birds were noisy and active. But none was found brooding and there seemed to be no young birds about. Jungle crows and Pariah kites which often flew very close to the jacanas were just ignored.

The SW. monsoon was practically over by the 21st of September. If the birds did breed during the monsoon, there should have been young ones about at the time of my visit. Some residents of the area said that ' some time ago ' a man, out to gather lotus flowers, had brought back a number of top-shaped greenish-brown eggs. But until there is a really reliable record of nests and eggs, we have to keep the question open.

Do first year birds breed? If they do not, there is a possibility of these Kanhangad birds being local migrants that form a non-breeding population. It was the total absence of any indication of breeding other than the breeding plumage that makes me offer such a suggestion.

I found Pheasant-tailed Jacana in non-breeding plumage at Kāttāmpalli (near Cannanore) on 22.xii.1968 and near Tellicherry on 31.i.69.

A CURIOUS PLAY OF RUFOUSBACKED SHRIKES

J. S. Serrao

At about 12.30 noon on 12 October 1969, I noticed a Rufousbacked Shrike (Lanius schach) perched atop a bush assume a horizontal stance and utter its ' frog-caught-by-a-snake ' call, with its wings half open on either side of the body, and shivering the while. This acted as an invitation to other Rufousbacks in the area for a social gathering and a prelude for a curious play.

In a matter of seconds another individual flew in giving the same call, and without alighting struck the perched bird. Both the individuals came tumbling down to earth gripping each other as they did so, and got disentangled hardly a few inches above the ground. No havoc was intended in this scuffle could be evident from the fact that no feathers were shed when the birds got disentangled. One of these two now settled on an adjacent bush-top and gave the identical call, shivering its wings as it did so, and the other individual displaced the caller from its perch in the manner the first bird had done. The manouvre was repeated by the two about 20 minutes, and in this duration I saw four more individuals fly in calling and join the fray. Every vantage point — a bush- or a palmyra-top — in the area of the scene was taken possession of. An individual would give this call, and one among the remaining five would swoop down on it as if it were by turns. When a swooping bird failed to make contact with the caller, and flew past, the caller would take off from its perch and chase it some distance away before both turned and returned to the perches in the field. The commotion continued till about 2 p.m. unabated, when the participants started melting away one by one, By about 2.10 the entire area was cleared of all but one Rufousback which called once or twice thereafter without evoking a response from the rest.

These observations were made opposite Check Post No. 7 of the Aarey Milk Colony, Bombay.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

B. J. Dangre writes in to say that there have been very good rains in Ahmadnagar this year and that the Kapurwadi Tank contains much more water in September than it usually does.

On 28th September 1969 he observed a flock of four spoonbills along with three Little Egrets and two Grey Herons. He had been observing the area since 1964 and his records seem to indicate that normally spoonbills arrive here only during November and December.

Mr Weldon Gratton, a landscape architect, late of the U.S. National Parks Service is now in Bombay at the invitation of the Government of Maharashtra. He has been asked to assist Government with the planning of the Borivili National Park. It was an experience walking through the Park with Mr Gratton on 12th October. His watchful eye takes in every curve, every elevation, and every depression of the landscape. The cut-away sections of the embankments on both sides of the road need to be properly sloped, and covered with vegetation to avoid erosion; the depth of the clearing on both sides of the road must be determined by the curvature of the road itself; though reforestation is highly desirable in most places some open areas are desirable to make a pleasing pattern of covered and open country; the pylons carrying the power cables should never exist in a park but now that they are here they could be painted in an obliterative manner. The foot trails which are being planned must be wide enough to prevent a sense of claustrophobia and yet no beautiful trees need be cut in the process of widening; all the various structures like the deer pen, the foresters' huts, the nursery, etc. should be organized in one area for reasons of efficiency as well as for preventing artificial intrusion inside an essentially wild area. Most important of all Mr Gratton seemed to

feel that the new tourist lodge built in that very scenic area overlooking Tulsi Lake should have been designed to cater to a large number of picnickers instead of catering for the needs of just one or two couples, whose occupation of the area might lead to social resentment. Mr Gratton is bound to make an important contribution to the recreational, and aesthetic needs of Bombay before he leaves.

Readers are invited to attend his talk on planning a National Park at Hornbill House, a notice about which will be posted shortly

CORRESPONDENCE

Grey Junglefowl in south India

I would like to refer to the article, ' Birds the angler yearns for ', by Signod Clare Dover, reproduced from The Daily Telegraph, London, 11 August 1969, which has appeared in the Newsletter of October 1969.

From what I have seen here in the South, the Grey Junglefowl is certainly not threatened with extinction although, their numbers may have declined considerably. The main cause for the decline in their numbers is not ' the feather smuggling racket ' alone, but also their capture and sale in large numbers by men who make a livelihood snaring game birds. This also applies to partridges, quails and peafowl. Hundreds of junglefowl, quail and partridges are sold in towns and cities throughout Mysore State for meat.

The biggest sufferers are partridges but a considerable toll is taken of the junglefowl also. One can get partridge served in and out of season in most restaurants and hotels in Bangalore and Mysore and even in a number of the city's fashionable clubs.

The Divisional Forest Officers find it difficult to control this snaring of game birds as their subordinate staff turn a blind eye to this and make no attempt to stop the snarers as they get a few birds off these people and this keeps them happy.

Although it may not be possible to stop these people snaring game birds completely, what can be done is discourage them is to levy heavy fines on anyone who is found serving these birds in any public place. The markets should also be visited frequently to see if any game birds are being sold.

It is only people who buy game birds from these snarers, who are, to a great extent, responsible for encouraging these people in carrying on snaring and selling game birds for meat. When the demand falls, fewer birds will be caught.

I am not in anyway trying to justify the sale of the neck feathers of junglefowl cocks and the feather smuggling racket referred to. The sale must be banned but the blame for the decline of the Grey Junglefowl should not be placed only on this but on the main cause which is snaring and selling for meat. I am sure this is well within our means to control if more honest effort is made in the right direction.

K. R. Sethna
Kadur Club, P.B. 29
Chikmagalur, Mysore St.

Birds in a Delhi garden

The Common Green Bee-eater (Merops orientalis) were really common a few months ago. By twos and threes they would perch sedately with a watchful eye looking for prey. They are bold and it is not hard for a birdwatcher to study them from close quarters. Every birdwatcher is most familiar with the House Sparrow, who even venture within a few feet of the watcher.

The Bay-backed Shrike (Lanius vittatus) is also common. It perches on telegraph wires looking to see if it can procure something for food. The black

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The Bay-backed Shrike (Lanius vittatus) is also common. It perches on telegraph wires looking to see if it can procure something for food. The black band through the eye is suggestive of this species.

There is a dead tree near my house. On going for a stroll one evening I saw a Coppersmith poke its head out of a hole. I was able to identify it in my The Book of Indian Birds, by Dr Salim Ali. I was lucky to hear it call: tūk, tūk, tūk. The Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum) is often seen searching for food in the grass along with the Common Myna.

Birdwatchers who are lucky enough to have their surroundings well wooded might even seen the Common Grey Hornbill.

The Blue Rock Pigeon (Columba livia), the Ring Dove (Streptopelia decaocto) and the Redvented Bulbul (Pycnonotus cafer) are also common. Let me also mention the Pariah Kite, soaring high up always thrills every birdwatcher! And those noisy Large Grey Babblers.

Master Girish Ananth
c/o Lt. Col. A. S. Iyer
Havelock Lines, Delhi

An Osprey and a Blue Bull near Vihar

An Osprey was seen near Vihar Lake on 5th October 1969.

On the 4th a Blue Bull was seen between the Deer Pens and the Vihar Lake. It looked in good condition and was dangerously unafraid. We can but hope that it will come to no harm.

D. A. Stairmand
c/o Mercantile Bank
Bombay

Birdwatchers' outing on 21 September 1969

I would like to report that I have seen the following birds on the excursion of the 21st September to Tulsi Lake.

A flock of Blackheaded Orioles	Goldenbacked Woodpecker
Indian Robin	Racket-tailed Drongo
Ashy Swallow Shrikes	Indian Tree Pie
Mahratta or Pied Woodpecker	Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher
Whitebreasted Kingfisher	Common Kingfisher

The Blacknaped Blue flycatchers seemed to be a dusky blue rather than a brilliant blue though I cannot be sure, for I saw them in shade. I also saw some small brown quails which I could not identify.

The most spectacular wild flowers I saw were Gloriosa superba and Quamoclit pennata.

The most spectacular butterflies were the great orange-tips (Hebomoia glaucippe), *

I was also expecting to see a Shama, but was unable to do so.

Anyway, I trust that having fulfilled my quota of bird species observed for the day, I shall not be penalized or excommunicated from the Club.

Winston Croado
Bombay

*Apart from the Great Orange Tip (Hebomoia glaucippe) the following butterflies were either seen on the wing or collected by Mr P. W. Soman, one of our Birdwatchers, for his College on the 21st. Common Indian Crow, Euploea core, Bushbrown (Mycalesis sp.), Common Evening Brown (Melanitis leda), the Great Eggfly (Hypolimnas bolina), the Danaid Eggfly (Hypolimnas misippus) both male and female, the Lemon Pansy (Precis lemonias), the Tailed Jay, Papilio agamemnon, the Lime Butterfly (Papilio demoleus), the Psyche (Leptosia nina), the Common Jezebel (Delias eucharis), the Indian Orange Tip (Ixias marianne) both male and female, the Yellow Orange Tip (Ixias pyrene), the Grass Yellow (Terias hecabe). Also Valeria valeria was profusely on the wing. -- Ed.

Zafar Futehally
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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 9–No. 12–1969 December



NEWSLETTER FOR

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Volume 9, Number 12 December 1969

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AN UNUSUAL INCIDENT OF A WILSON'S PETREL IMMOBILISED BY A CRAB

N. K. Prasad

During the 63rd Cruise of the Indo-Norwegian Research Vessel VARUNA, on 12.x.1964 at about 04.25 hours while carrying out routine observations on deck at Station No. 2669 (74°43'E., 10°N.) about 100 miles west of Cochin, I found at the stern deck a bird frantically struggling with a crab clinging to its neck. The bird, identified later as Wilson's Petrel (Oceanitis oceanicus) was found struggling to free itself of the crab (Charybdis /Goniosoma/ cruciata), but the efforts were of no avail as the chelae of the crab were firmly pinching on the feathers of the neck. Even while the struggling bird was picked up the crab did not let go its hold on the feathers. After some time the crab which was alive was removed and preserved in formalin and the petrel was kept alive and brought to shore where it lived for two days more but refusing to take any sort of food, died on 15.x.1964 evening. Once the petrel was free of the crab, it appeared to be normally active. The petrel was skinned after death and this as well as the crab are deposited with the research collection at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Mandapam Camp.

A few measurements on the crab and the petrel are given below in order to visualise the sizes.

Charybidis (Goniosoma) cruciata		Oceanitis oceanicus	
Length of carapace	34 mm	Length between tips of spread wings	333 mm
Width of carapace	25 mm	Base of bill to tip of tail	144 mm
Wet weight of crab	8.1 g	Length of upper mandible	12 mm

As soon as the bird was brought ashore on the 12th evening, a photograph of it with the crab placed in position in which it was first found was taken. The incident is so peculiar that it is felt worth recording. It is not unusual for sea birds to be immobilised by other organisms; a recent note by Jones (1959, J. Mar. biol. Assn. India 1(1): 97) records of a snipe getting trapped by a clam (Catelysia opima). In the present instance, the Vessel was working at a deep station well over 50 miles off the edge of the continental shelf and it is not known whether the bird had got ' trapped ' while picking up

the crab from the water, and had flown to the vessel attracted by the lights. Wilson's Petrel are known to fly in the wake of ships, but little is known about the nocturnal habits of the bird. Another point is whether the petrel would prey on a crab of the above size normally. Since the deck was cleaned well after the last trawling operation carried out off Alleppey coast on the 11th at 12.0C hours it appears not likely that the crab could have been lying on the deck and could have clung on to an exhausted bird when it alighted on deck in the night probably attracted by lights. That the bird would have arrived exhausted on the deck due to flying long distance in bad weather appears unlikely as the weather was fine throughout the 63rd Cruise of R.V. VARUNA from 7.x.1964 to 12.x.1964 during which the area from Cape Comorin to Cochin was covered. It would be interesting to hear from readers of any similar incidents involving sea birds.

I am very thankful to Dr E. G. Silas for the identification of the petrel and the crab and for his encouragement.

/There are several instances of this nature in Col. R. E. Meinertzhagen's book Pirates and Predators. There is also a record in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (Vol.40:631) of a Painted Snipe ' trapped ' by a large Ampularia shell adhering firmly to the middle toe of its foot. - Eds./

THE INDIAN THREE-TOED KINGFISHER (CEYX ERYTHACUS)

Winston Creado

In early July I visited the National Park area, and there, by a hidden forest stream, I saw a Three-toed Kingfisher. The bird was a brilliant specimen, and the first time it flashed past me, I almost felt that I had seen a Crimson Topaz Hummingbird (Topaza pella). I followed it upstream and caught another glimpse of it in its jewelled trajectory across thr trickling stream, uttering its curiously insect-like cry. In flight it appeared as a lustrous rose-pink bird with a yellow beak. Then it settled on a tree, and I was able to watch it for a moment or two before it disappeared.

This was my second meeting with the bird. The first occurred about 15 years ago, when I was just 9 or 10 years old, and a Ceyx erythracus flew into my house at Marol village (on the Aarey Colony road). I did not know then what sort of kingfisher it was, but I was so excited at seeing it flying around the room, that I started yelling, and the resultant racket so shocked the bird that it fell straight into into the waste-paper basket, where the scraps of paper cushioned its fall.

I kept it in a cage for a couple of days, and fed it on live fish from my aquarium, which I kept swimming in a little bowl of water in the cage. The kingfisher would spash into the bowl and catch the fish. (The fish were common silver fish from the local tanks, and not exotic aquarium fish.) At the end of three days, all the fish from my aquarium were finished, and I had to release the bird.

To return to my July excursion, I saw a couple of blackheaded orioles along the same stream, and heard their flute-like calls resounding through that glade of green enchantment. I also caught glimpses of some other birds: whitebreasted waterhen, blacknaped blue flycatcher (?), and heard several more; but I was reluctant to pursue them into the monsoon tangle of grass and undergrowth, for if I had got bitten by a snake and died, I would hever have heard the end of it from my folks.

In the paddy fields beside the road I saw spotted doves ' grazing ', and ashy- swallow-shrikes buzzing and dive-bombing crows and driving them away, probably from their nesting sites in the palmyra palms. I also saw a baby black drongo with a diminutive fish-tail,

sitting in a mango tree, whilst the parent bird fluttered and whistled all around the tree.

AN ALBINO JUNGLE BABBLER

A. P. Gupte

Cases of albinism among birds have been reported from time to time. In a note in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (Vol. 49(4): 788-9), H. M. Molesworth has reported sighting an albino snipe in the Salt Lakes outside Calcutta. In an editorial footnote to this, the sightings of the following albino birds are mentioned: House Sparrow, Hoopoe, Crow, Shoveller, Comb Duck, Malay Spotted Dove, and Rufousbacked Shrike, besides three sightings of albino snipes. A pure albino Black Partridge was received by the Bombay Natural History Society from Maharao of Kutch. A. K. Mandal (1965) reported from Shillong a partial albino Redvented Bulbul (J. Bengal nat. Hist. Soc. 32 (2): 210-12). I have not come across any record of an albino Jungle Babbler (Turdoides striatus), which I happened to see recently.

About two miles south of Indore, along the Bombay-Agra Highway, there is a Coca-Cola factory. A field opposite this factory is frequented by a flock of Jungle Babblers. One bird in this flock is a partial albino. Its head, back and abdomen are completely white. A few lower wing feathers and two tail feathers have the normal dark colour. I am unable to say whether the albinism of this bird is a result of a genetic disorder or due to a deficiency in diet or blood circulation (L. W. Wing, 1956, Natural History of Birds, New York - quoted from Mandal).

THE BAYBANDED CUCKOO IN NORTH KERALA

K. K. Neelakantan

In another 10 days (20.x.1969) I will be completing one year's stay in North Kerala. I can recall having heard the Baybanded Cuckoo in almost every month. Twice in the course of these 12 months I have found a juvenile of this species being fed and fussed over by a pair of Common Ioras. The first time I saw such a trio was on 2 January 1969; the last date on which this family was seen was 8th February. On the 9th October at 10 a.m. my wife discovered a juvenile Baybanded Cuckoo with a pair of Ioras assiduously feeding it. As Dr Salim Ali writes in his Birds of Kerala (1969) that nothing is recorded about the breeding of this cuckoo for Kerala, I shall send a note for publication in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society

SOME NILGIRI BIRDS

Sarah Jameson

(Continued from p.8 , Newsletter Vol. 9, No. 11)

The Indian and Indian Tree Pipits are found lower down in the Nilgiris, but the Nilgiri Pipit is found up to about 7000 feet. Possibly the Small Skylark is found at these heights but I imagine only in the more open areas.

I was thrilled to see an EMERALD DOVE sitting on the drive just beside the house one evening. It is a very striking dove with its brilliant green upper plumage and white forehead and eyebrows. The only other time I have seen it was in Rajshahi district in East Bengal, many years ago.

The SPOTTED DOVE is fairly common, and I have often seen it on the ground in the garden, in the lane and even on the main road. It very reluctantly moves out of the way of cars. It is one of our most common birds in Disergarh.

The Bluewinged and Blossomheaded Parakeets, the Common Green, and the Blue Rock Pigeon are all found in the Nilgiris, but at lower elevations than Coonoor. The Nilgiri Wood Pigeon however is found up to the highest sholas. A doctor friend who lives here and who has been going out with his gun for years tells me that the Greyfronted Green Pigeon is a resident around Coonoor, so is the Red Spurfowl, Jerdon's Imperial Pigeon is found here from about July to September.

I very frequently hear the familiar call of the SMALL GREEN BARBET, but have only once managed to see it. The bird was in a tree in our garden and I trained the binoculars to where the sound was coming from, and just by sheer chance, it came out of the leaves onto a leafless part of the branch, and I had a very clear view of it. Their colouring is excellent camouflage.

Two or three times I have seen and heard a drongo, but very high up in a tree. This must have been either the Black, or more probably, the GREY DRONGO, as this seems to be more of a hill bird. The other drongos are found on these hills but on the lower slopes. The Racket-tailed, the Whitebellied and the Bronzed. I have seen the Bronzed twice in Disergarh, and the black is always with us there.

Recently during the day I have been hearing a two, sometimes three or even four note rather hoopoe-like call, which must be the CUCKOO. It must be a resident here though I have never seen it. I am not sure whether the Indian Cuckoo is found as high as this. I am very thankful that the Common Hawk-Cuckoo is not a resident of these heights, with its maddening brainfever screams! Its calls are one of my most vivid memories of our stay in Dacca!

A male PURPLE SUNBIRD spent just one day with us in May. It is sad they seem to be rather rare in this area. They are very familiar friends in Disergarh. I once had a wonderful view of the scarlet and yellow feathers of the ' armpits ' when a male hovered in front of a flower. It is a beautiful little bird in full sun in its summer dress, with the green and purple reflections glinting on its black plumage. The female's colouring is fairly sober, greenish brown above and quite a bright yellow below. As soon as the weather starts getting unpleasantly hot, we hear their very sweet and beautiful song, usually from the top of a Rain Tree.

Last July and August I saw several SMALL SUNBIRDS feasting daily on the nectar of Achania flowers. These minute birds, the smallest of our sunbirds, look in their breeding plumage like gleaming jewels in the sun, with their green caps, deep crimson upperparts and breast, purple rump and throat, and yellow underparts. The female's colouring is very like that of the female Purple Sunbird. I was not very happy to find in my notes that I had recorded its call as more than a single chik. Recently I have been hearing chiks and wondered if it was the Nilgiri Flowerpecker, which tiny bird is very like a female sunbird and is found up to the highest peaks. Tickell's Flowerpecker is only found at

lower elevations. During the past 6 weeks Coonoor has been blest with 14 inches of rain, since when the garden has come to life, and with the flowers, has come more abundant bird life. The Small Sunbirds are back again, and I have fortunately been able to verify my notes. I have just had a wonderfully clear and near view of a male Small Sunbird, not in breeding plumage, its red lower back showing up well in the sun, busily sipping nectar from a hibiscus flower. It was calling either a single chik or two, three, four or even five chiks, so closely run together as to be one ' word '. They also have a call rather like the sharp wich of the Purple Sunbird. I have just seen a Small Sunbird in the hibiscus hedge which was ' chiking ' its head off — going on and on full speed ahead, and sounded exactly like a child pretending to be a ' puff puff '! I lost count of the quickly repeated chiks. Since the beginning of June, the Achania shrubs have been alive with these little birds, and their attractive fast whistling ' songs ' can be heard almost throughout the day, literally from dawn till dusk. I have also seen them again in the tall Achania shrubs, and apart from chiks they were making excited sibilant little whistles of what sounds just like seesurrah, with the accent on the see, repeated very quickly three times. They are rather difficult birds to see properly as they dart with lightning speed from flower to flower.

I have not yet seen the Nilgiri Rufousbreasted Laughing Thrush which together with the MOUNTAIN THRUSH appear to be the only thrushes found here at this height. I saw a Mountain Thrush for the first time in our wild olive tree, just a few minutes after seeing a NILGIRI VERDITER or BLUE FLYCATCHER, also for the first time. It is not often one is lucky enough to see two ' new ' birds together.

I have not heard nightjars here, though I think the Longtailed and the Jungle Nightjars would be found as high as this. As far as I know there are no owls here. The Barred Jungle Owlet and the Forest Eagle-Owl reach a height of only 5000 feet or so.

There are about seven woodpeckers found in the Nilgiris, two of which inhabit this altitude, the tiny Spotted Piculet and Malherbe's Goldenbacked. I have neither seen nor heard them. The Scallybellied Green, the Mahratta, the Indian Pigmy Woodpecker and Malabar Great Black and the Goldenbacked are all found at lower elevations. The Mahratta is very common in Disergarh, and we also frequently see and hear the Goldenbacked.

The Blueheaded and Blue Rock Thrush, and the Ground Thrushes are all to be found at lower elevations. I was so pleased that an Orange-headed Ground Thrush spent several weeks with us in Disergarh last winter, and we often saw it at very close range on the ground. It has a rather improbable colour scheme of orangy chestnut and bluish grey. We once saw a Blueheaded Rock Thrush in our Disergarh garden in March, and on two occasions during winter we saw a Blue Rock Thrush. I have neither seen nor heard the Malabar Whistling Thrush so perhaps this is a bit too high for it.

The JUNGLE and HOUSE CROWS are found here, but the Jungle Crows are far more numerous and strangely enough, seem to be tamer than the House Crows. Unfortunately they are attracted to the back of the house by the dog's food, and know meal hours to the minute. They have become very used to the presence of humans in this area as the clothes lines are strung here. One day a Jungle Crow was sitting on a rail, and averting my head slightly, I deliberately walked past it, and to my astonishment the crow never moved, though had I stretched out my hand I could have touched it. These Jungle Crows make very comic sounds sometimes, among them one exactly like a short sharp puppy bark.

I have seen SPOTTED MUNIAS here a few times, in parties of 4 or 5, always in breeding dress, in April, July and August. They are attractive little birds, chocolate-brown above, and white underparts scattered with little ' crescent moons '. It is fascinating watching them hopping about gleaning grass seeds.

I have twice had the brief pleasure of seeing a male PARADISE FLYCATCHER flying through the garden, though they seem to be very uncommon in this locality. On 3rd June I saw a male NILGIRI VERDITER FLY-

CATCHER. Fortunately it sat still long enough in our olive tree to enable me to get an excellent view of it, before it was chased about the branches by a Mountain Thrush. Are the latter known to be pugnacious, as there seemed to be no reason why it was chasing the flycatcher. Both birds were silent all the time I observed them.

There is one Flycatcher found in this area which I have not yet seen, the Black-and-Orange. On June 19th we paid a visit to Rallia Dam, the Coonoor Municipal Reservoir, which at the moment is mainly a depressing expanse of mud, with only a little water in it. Until the lake is filled by rain, this water cannot be used. The hill it is on is 7725 feet above sea level, but the reservoir itself is a little over 7000 feet. The lake is surrounded by forest, and on the very edge of the trees I had a very fine and close view of two GREY-HEADED FLYCATCHERS. They were darting about after insects, returning to their perches after each sally. Every now and then an attractive loud whistling ' song ' was uttered. The ceylonensis breeds in the Nilgiris during spring. It is a very pretty little bird with grey head and neck, greenish yellow upper plumage and yellowish lower parts.

I have quite often come across the White Spotted Fantail Flycatcher, sometimes on the ground and sometimes in trees. One morning when our lane was quiet, I saw it on the ground, and standing quite still, I watched it from only a few yards away pirouetting and dancing and flirting its tail, every now and then leaping into the air. I I was treated to this entrancing sight for several minutes. This pretty bird has a not unattractive ' song ' of 7 notes, rendered in rather jerky amateurish whistles. The Nilgiris are rich in Flycatchers — there are at least eleven - but the Redbreasted, Tickell's Redbreasted Blue, the Whitebellied Blue, the Bluethroated, the Brown, and the Rufoustailed Flycatchers are all found on the lower slopes.

At the beginning of May, I saw for the first time a solitary Tickell's Redbreasted Blue Flycatcher flitting about in a tree. It is and attractive bird with its dark blue upper plumage, bluish black wings and tail, pale rusty throat and breast, and white below. On 24th June I heard a pretty little song, quite loud, just outside my room, and there in the cherry tree not 20 feet from my window, was a Tickell's Redbreasted. It was not as brightly coloured as the first one I saw near the gate, so it was probably a female. I was able to see it very clearly. The bird could not have noticed me behind the expanded metal of the window, as one insect it darted after was on the ground about six inches from the window! I heard and saw it several times later in the day and also the next day. I hope it comes to stay.

The Golden Oriole barely reaches this height, and I have neither seen nor heard it. It always spends a few weeks with us in Disergarh, during June and July only. Its pleasant musical whistles contrast strongly with the harsh cheeah sounds. The Blackheaded Oriole is with us almost all the time in Disergarh, but is not found much above 4000 feet in the Nilgiris.

I am looking foward to seeing the Goldfronted Chloropsis, the Velvetfronted Nuthatch, the Shortwing, all gaily coloured birds found at this altitude, as is the Painted Bush-Quail, but probably in more open country than just round our house. The Shama and the exotic Malabar Trogon are found lower down in the Nilgiris. The Woodcock is here in winter from October to March, and apparently makes the journey to and fro from the Himalayas in one long flight of at least 1500 miles. The Fairy Bluebird is found up to about 5000 feet, so is unfortunately not seen here. We once had a glimpse of a male on the track from Buxa Duar into Bhutan.

Except for the COMMON PARIAH KITE and the SHIKRA, I have not seen any of the members of the Gypidae and Falconidae families here yet. On June 15th I saw for the first time here, a Shikra sitting motionless high up in a tall tree in the garden. It was silent all the time I observed it. What I could see of the upper plumage was bluish grey, but the white breast finely barred with rusty brown was clearly visi-

bls. I wonder if they breed up here? The nesting season is from March to June.

There is a magnificent old Eucalyptus globulus in the front of our garden where the land falls away quite steeply. It has a girth of exactly 13 feet, and is roughly 80 feet high, and it is so placed as to have a very commanding view. There are wide spreading branches, the ends of which serve as ideal lookout posts for the COMMON PARIAH KITE family which have nested there for years. The nest is more than three quarters of the way to the top and must be at least 65 feet from the ground. They are usually built much lower. Last May I noticed two nestlings which have now grown into handsome birds. The parents and young appear to be living there in complete harmony. So far I have not noticed any signs of activity round the nest, so perhaps the old birds are not breeding this year. I do not think they will all be there together much longer, as I am seeing the 4 birds together there much less often than in April. The entire heads, necks and breasts of the old birds are heavily streaked with white, in fact they look more white than brown, but the young are a uniform slightly rufous-brown from base of bill to end of tail, with no white whatsoever round their chins or under their tails, nor is there yet any sign of the dark cross bars. These kites have no objection to be looked at, and I have often studied them with binoculars in full sun, either in the tree or soaring effortlessly with a grace that surely cannot be surpassed. The forked tails of them all are usually ragged, due I suppose, to the endless warfare carried out with crows. These kites are very well behaved as far as we are concerned and never snatch our food from the lawn, or the dog's food either. Judging by the indignant outcries of the crows circling the tree at least once a day, I imagine the kites live mainly on a diet of baby crows! Much squealing goes on, and they have a variety of calls. Perhaps the most common call is something that sounds like eweeer and sometimes chee (heavily accented) che che che che che. The name Cheel is a perfect example of onomatopoeia, if said slowly, and with vibration!

After a wet evening and a damp night, June 3rd dawned bright and sunny. At 6.30 a.m. we saw one of the young kites perched at the bare end of a widespreading branch of the Eucalyptus. The bird was facing the east, and obviously enjoying the warmth of the sun. After a while we noticed that it had spread out its wings, presumably to dry them out thoroughly. The strange thing was that it had hooked the primaries of one wing round a thin upright twig to support the wing, and the primaries of the other wing were hooked round the end of the branch it was sitting on. In this most ingenious way the kite saved itself the effort of holding out its wings! This amusing pose was held for just over ten minutes, and I hope the photograph taken with a telephoto lens comes out well.

I am interested in bird calls, and perhaps for this reason the birds that have intrigued me most in Coonoor, are the PENINSULAR INDIAN SCIMITAR BABBLERS. Alas during this visit I have heard them close to very seldom, but last May and June, I was able to hear, if not see them, every single morning for those two months. Any time between 6 and 7 a.m. — sometimes later if they overslept — I would hear them in a big tree in the next compound. This was a signal for me to leap out of bed and grab my binoculars, as I knew that within a minute they would be in our first tree. They had a regular ' beat ' and almost invariably followed the same route through our garden. Fortunately two of their favourite breakfast stops are just outside my bedroom, and though they are shy birds and generally very difficult to observe, I had many good view of them. They are strange looking birds, with their yellow scimitar-like bills, a very conspicuous white eyebrow, and large white ' bib '. When seen from in front, the two eyebrows form a prominent white broken V. Whistler writes that ' This Scimitar-Babbler is divided into a number of races distinguished by small details of coloration of the plumage and size of bill. The rich olive-brown form Pomatorhinus horsfieldii travancoreensis

occupies the Lower Western Ghats from North Kanara to Travancore, including the Nilgiris. Individuals keep in touch with each other by a variety of mellow buffling and whistling calls and when excited break into the torrent of loud shrieks and whistles which are used by all the scimitar babblers. In the case of pairs the male acts as leader and is followed about from one bush or tree to another by the female who acknowledges every one of his musical whistles with a subdued kroo-kroo or kro-kant.

I wrote down as accurately as possible all the sounds I heard them utter, apart from the long bubbling noises, which are mostly of 8 bubbles. While the birds were on their round, I noticed that on any one morning sometimes only one kind of call was used, but more often, when about half way round, they would switch over to one of the others. My experience was that the 3-note call of oo-poo-poo was not more frequently used than one of the four-note calls. Generally the first note is slightly accented, and all the notes are more or less on one tone. Another 4-note call is very difficult to describe but as near as the piano can get the notes, it is as follows: A (the first A above Middle C), A sharp, G (below the first A) and back to the first A, with the same time interval between each of the notes. One morning I had a particularly good view of three birds in a hedge just in front of my window. One was silent throughout, but a male kept uttering a TWO note call, the second note a tone lower than the first, and as usual his wife was answering him. There is also a five-note call, the 3rd and 4th notes uttered so quickly they are almost run together, and another with the first note slightly accented, the notes given the same value and more or less on the same tone. I have studied these calls very carefully and heard them many times. There was no doubt whatever that they were made by these scimitar babblers as the birds were so close, and almost before the male stops speaking, his wife joins in.

I find that I have seen and/or heard 38 to 40 birds here, and it is interesting that only eleven of them are to be found in our garden in Disergarh.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The publication of the Newsletter book on which we had built high hopes hasunfortunately been abandoned for the moment. The Secretary of the National Book Trust wrote to the Editor saying that the material extracted from the Newsletter is not suitable for the Young India Series. College students, he feels, are not sufficiently interested to follow up the type of material which is contained in the Newsletter. They want something more easily digestible. We will therefore have to look for another publisher who has a higher opinion of our young readers.

The General Assembly of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources meets at New Delhi on 24th November to 2nd December 1969.

By the time this Newsletter reaches you the general assembly will have concluded. The theme of the assembly is the environmental and economic value of Conservation. This is a subject which has been selected as being particularly relevant to India and in the hope that a large number of people who are not normally interested in Conservation and Preservation of Wild Life will cock their ears and listen to what the experts may have to say.

Several important papers on birds have been presented. Among these the following will be of particular interest to our readers:

1. CAPTIVITY BREEDING AS AN AID TO PRACTICAL CONSERVATION, by Philip Wayre

The author pleads for the artificial breeding of birds and animals which are in danger of extinction in the wild. He refers to the Pheasant Trust at Great Witchingham specially set up to breed threatened species of game birds. Of the 48 species of Pheasants living in the world, no less than 16 are considered to be threatened today and of these eight are bred regularly in the Trust's Collection.

2. ECOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF BIRDS OF PREY IN THE CENTRAL REGION OF THE EUROPEAN PART OF THE USSR, by V. M. Galushin

Birds of prey have often been attacked by game keepers, farmers and hunters in the mistaken belief that they are pests and play no important part in the ecology of nature. The author found that the two allegedly harmful species, the Goshawk and the Marsh Harrier formed less than 5% of the total number of birds of prey (which averaged 160 breeding pairs per thousand square kilometres). He found that the entire population of birds of prey destroyed a maximum of 4 to 5% of game birds and 6 to 9% of wildfowl. The report was apparently of great value as it led to the issue in 1964 of new regulations which now effectively protect birds of prey in the USSR.

3. BIRDS IN INDIA'S AGRICUTURAL ECONOMY - A Supplementary Note, by Salim Ali

Dr Salim Ali's views on the subject are well known from his writings in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society and in the Newsletter as well as from the researches which he is supervising under grants received from the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. He has always held that an agricultural country like India must pay greater attention to the role of birds in keeping insect pests under control. In this paper he writes that the only attempt at a scientific assessment of food of birds in India chiefly in regard to agriculture was done in Bihar in the first decade of the present century by C. S. Mason and H. Maxwell-Lefroy. It is high time that serious birdwatchers of our Club should take steps to fill up this gap in our knowledge.

4. THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD, by Salim Ali

The status of the Great Indian Bustard is causing a great deal of concern. No proper censusing has ever been attempted in the past, neither are dependable figures available for its surviving populations. The author feels that the estimated population of 1260 birds is unduly optimistic. There is a proposal to creat a Bustard Sanctuary in the extensive grasslands of Gujarat and the World Wild Life Fund, Indian National Appeal, hopes to sponsor a project whereby R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji will survey these areas which will then hopefully be designated as sanctuaries by the governments concerned.

5. ORGANO-CHLORINE POLLUTANTS OF THE RIVERS, AND THE HERON (ARDEA CINEREA LINN.), by Ian Prestt

The damage done to birds through pesticides and synthetic chemicals of various kinds has been causing alarm in the past decade, but it is important to know what the exact position is because it is obviously difficult to avoid using chemicals of this kind in an agricultural country. However if the danger limits can be properly determined it is valuable for administrators to keep the damage in check.

Since 1964 a study has been made in eastern England of the Heron, a freshwater fish-feeding predator. It has been found that this bird carries higher organo-chlorine residue than any other wild bird in Britain. Virtually every egg laid has now an abnormally thin shell, the reduction being almost 20% over the normal thickness. There is also a deliberate tendency to break their own eggs which can perhaps be connected with the change in the quality of the shells. Unless the pollutants flowing into the rivers from agricultural and industrial use can be much better controlled in the future, the fate of the heron is bound to be endangered.

After the IUCN meeting there will be assemblies of the National Council for Bird Preservation and of the Migratory Animals Pathological Survey at Bharatpur. A 'tent city' is being put up in Keoladeo Ghana Sanctuary to house the delegates. We shall report on the meeting in the next issue.

CORRESPONDENCE

Some recent bird observations from Delhi

Last time my observations were not so deep. Well on the morning of 8th November when I came back from a small field where I had gone for birdwatching, I saw a green blob on a telegraph wire. I assumed it to be a parakeet. I raised my binoculars and focused them on the bird. Well, now I should say birds for what I saw was about five or six common green bee-eaters (Merops orientalis) huddled together! I think the fellows were feeling cold!

The Baybacked Shrike comes to my garden. This bird was not closely studied by me before. It is an active bird, from what I have seen through my observations. It occasionally alights on the ground and takes its post again on a wire or pole, where it perches motionless for a few minutes, only to fly to a branch and perch there. I cannot vouch for this statement's truth which I have reasoned. The Baybacked Shrike flies to the ground occasionally, picks up an insect and flies to its perch where the quarry is swallowed.

I studied the hoopoe closely. On the 8th I saw a number of hoopoes pecking and scolding for all their worth. Perhaps it was for or perch, or may be an insect. Probably I saw a Grey Shrike, but I shant mark it in my notebook until I am sure. The babblers here are confusing and I have not yet noted down their observations although I think I do hear the Large Babbler's kay, kay, kay noises. I aim to clear my doubts by the end of this month.

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Delhi
12 November 1969

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